University of Alberta

Grassroots Blogging Practice in America and China

By

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Abstract

Blogging is one of the latest forms of online communication, and present academic studies are mainly on its role in education, politics and business. Few studies are available on grassroots bloggers, still less is the research on the comparison of blog contents in different cultures. This paper reports some demographic studies on 60 American and 60 Chinese bloggers randomly collected from the immense blogosphere. Content analysis of posts shows that American and Chinese bloggers mainly document daily lives in their blogs, while serious topics such as sex, politics, and religion are not common. This suggests that the cultural variation may not play a significant role in determining the contents of blogs, but rather that individual blogging practice is in some sense an international genre. The author also finds that there is a positive relationship between posts and comments, as well as blogrolls and comments.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to Blogging

Blogging is one of the latest forms of online communication coming after email, BBS (Bulletin Boards System), and ICQ (I Seek You). Wikipedia, the online free encyclopedia, defines weblog, or simply blog, as "a website in which messages are posted and displayed with the newest at the top."[1] Merriam-Webster named "blog" No. One Word of the Year 2004, and defines it as "a web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer."[2] The word "blog" was included in the 11th edition of Merriam-Webster's Dictionary published in 2005. Blogger.com, one of the earliest and largest blog hosting services, defines blog as an "easy-to-use web site, where you can quickly post thoughts, interact with people, and more."[3] Technorati, a very popular blog search engine, defines blog as "a personal journal on the web."[4]

The first blog, according to Wikipedia, was created in 1995, so it is a very nascent form of online publishing. It is not easy to calculate the exact number of bloggers, because new bloggers appear every second; some bloggers are slow in updating their blogs or even give up blogging once the initial enthusiasm dies out. However, scholars do believe that the number of bloggers around the world is increasing at an astronomical speed. Technorati is "currently tracking 33.7 million sites and 2.2 billion links"[5] and its data show that "there are about 70,000 new blogs a day." [6] Yun (2006) believes that there are about 60 million bloggers in China in 2006.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blogging Data retrieved on April 10, 2006.
[2] http://www.merriam-webster.com/info/04words.htm
[3] http://www.blogger.com/start
[4] http://www.technorati.com/about/

A blog entry usually consists of the following components: title (the name of one's blog), body (posts which are the main part of blog), comments (the feedback added by readers), permalink (abbreviation for "permanent link", a type of URL designed to bookmark the current blog post), post date (the date and time when the post was published), blogroll (a collection of links to other weblogs), tags (subjects that the post discusses; one post can have more than one tag), trackback (links to other sites that refer to the specific post in one's blog) etc.

In its early days, blog is mainly text-oriented. However, with the development of blogging technique, new forms have appeared gradually, such as photo blogging, mobile blogging and video blogging.

Creating a blog is not very difficult; the blogger does not need to know HTML language. For example, at Blogger.com, one just needs to do the following three steps: first create an account, then name his blog, and finally choose his favorite template among many choices, when it is done, the blogger can publish his thoughts immediately.

Free of charge is another important reason for the rapid appearance of blogs. There are many free blog hosting services, such as Blogger.com, MSN Spaces,

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[5] http://www.technorati.com/ Data retrieved on April 10, 2006.
[6] http://www.technorati.com/about/ Data retrieved on April 10, 2006.

Livejournal.com, Xanga.com, Blurty.com, Opendiary.com, to name just a few. Of course blog hosting services such as Livejournal.com also provide paid accounts. Users of a paid account need to pay a small fee each month and could enjoy more powerful blogging features. For example, paid account users could "use the advanced search feature to find users by city, state, country, age, friends."[7]

1.2 Significance of the Thesis

Blogging is a relatively new communication form and is winning rapid popularity. The number of bloggers around the world is increasing at an exponential speed. Blogging give bloggers the chance to record daily life, express feelings, and share thoughts on various topics with interested readers. Blogging is a private writing practice, but it is more than that, it is a forum in which virtual sociality exists—the blogger posts, and readers' comments are a form of social exchange. The Blogroll plays the function of a web knot through which bloggers around the world are possibly interconnected, though they may not know each other. It is not an exaggeration to say that blogging is changing Internet users' online virtual life, and to a certain extent, is changing their social life.

Since blogging is a nascent thing and is in the process of development, people's understanding of it is still not enough. Even though there are some academic studies on the different roles of blogging in journalism, politics, education, and business, more research needs to be done should we want to have a thorough understanding of it. For example, the majority of bloggers in the immense blogosphere are documenting their private lives, and their purpose of blogging is to share thoughts with readers. Hence it is worthwhile to conduct research on the grassroots bloggers who make this new online writing practice so vigorous and vibrant. Through my research, I want to raise the following questions: what are the age, gender and geographical distributions of bloggers? Are American bloggers and Chinese bloggers talking about similar topics or different topics? What are their favourite topics? Is there any relation between posts and comments? Will bloggers receive more comments if they link more frequently to other bloggers? Hopefully, the answers to such questions will widen our insight into the important yet complex social reality of blogging.

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[7] https://www.livejournal.com/create.bml

1.3 Structure and Main Arguments

This thesis consists of five chapters.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the basic knowledge of blogs.

Chapter 2 is literature review, in which I enumerate the main arguments of scholars on this new online publishing. We can find answers to the following questions in many academic papers, such as: what is a blog? What are the demographics of the blogosphere? What are bloggers talking about in their private online spaces? Why do people blog? How to improve comments to one's blog? While most scholars discuss blogs from the perspectives of social sciences and humanities, technical literature on how to improve blogging software is also available. In Chapter 2, I summarize the ideas of scholars on the application of blogs in different fields. Scholars mainly discuss blogs in journalism (the blog has a symbiotic relation with traditional media); in politics (the blog is used for political campaigns); in education (the blog facilitates and promotes communication among students and instructors); and in business (companies blog to publicize products, to communicate with customers).

In Chapter 3, I conduct a case study on Muzi Mei (hereafter as MZM), the first well-known female sex blogger in China. Background information on the "MZM Phenomenon" is provided. Brief introduction to four other popular Chinese female bloggers is also given. In this Chapter, readers can find my tentative analysis on the different experiences of MZM and the well-known American sex blogger Jessica Cutler.

Chapter 4 is the core of the thesis. Considering that academic research on grassroots bloggers has not been given enough attention, I have decided to focus on them in my thesis. I randomly collected 60 American bloggers and Chinese bloggers from the immense blogosphere. I counted the posts, links and comments of each blogger; and noted down the demographics of these bloggers, such as gender, age, and geographical location. Then I conducted qualitative content analysis on these posts. Demographics of the American and Chinese bloggers show that most bloggers are young people; the proportion of female bloggers is a little higher than that of male bloggers. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (*r*) shows that there is a moderate and positive relation between one's posts and the comments received, as well as between links to other bloggers and comments received.

Surprisingly, even though America and China differ significantly in the aspects of politics, histories, cultures, and ideologies. Such differences are not obvious in the posts of American and Chinese bloggers. Topics on school life, family life, work, entertainment, feelings, health, and confession are popular for both American and Chinese bloggers. Serious topics such as politics, religion and sex, however, are uncommon for both of them.

I tentatively provide some reasons to explain this puzzling phenomenon. My main argument is that the blog is mainly a private online space and bloggers are more interested in documenting things closely related to their private lives. The Hierarchy of Needs put forward by American psychologist Abraham Maslow is useful in the analysis of the phenomenon.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the thesis, in which I briefly summarize the main content of the thesis. Some limitations of the thesis as well as further possible research topics are also presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Even though blogging is a relatively new phenomenon in the digital age, it is widely discussed in the academic field. Scholars in humanities and social science focus on the history, status quo and future development of blogging, as well as its influence on bloggers themselves and the whole society at large. The application of blogs to journalism, political campaigns, education and business are very popular topics. Scholars in computing science usually view blogs from a technical perspective.

2.1 General Discussion of Blogs

Definition: What is a blog? Who are the bloggers? What are bloggers talking about in their posts? These are basic questions that scholars have to answer. Since the blog is a nascent online publishing form, scholars still differ to some extent on the definition. Goldsborough (2003) defines a blog as a journal in which people write, often in a brutally direct way, about their observations, experiences, thoughts and emotions. Weil (2003) enumerates 20 definitions of "blog". Clyde (2004) believes the common features of the blog are: "chronological arrangement of items (with the most recent first), frequency of updating, provision of links to internet sources and the incorporation of comments from readers." Nussbaum (2004) argues that while there may be slight differences between the formats of blogs in different blog-hosting websites, the essence of them is the same, "a Livejournal is a Blurty is a Xanga is a

DeadJournal is a DiaryLand." Instead of giving a strict definition of the word "blog", Stone (2004) lists multifaceted contents of blogs, saying:

> Is blogging self-expression, personal publishing, a diary, amateur journalism, the biggest disruptive technology since e-mail, an online community, alternative media, curriculum for students, a customer relations strategy, knowledge management, navel gazing, a solution to boredom, a dream job, a style of writing, e-mail to everyone, a fad, the answer to illiteracy, an online persona, social networking, resume fodder, phonecam pictures, or something to hide from your mother? It is all of these and more (Stone 2004).

Rodi (2005) lists five distinguished characteristics of blogs: frequently updated, relatively short posts, links to source material, clear ownership, and optional links to other recommended weblogs. To sum it up, the blog can be a frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and Web links.

Demographic Study of Blogs: Where are bloggers from? Are there more female bloggers than male bloggers in the immense blogosphere? Is blogging mainly the privilege of young people? It is important for scholars to give answers to these questions. Though many academic papers on blogs are based on empirical experience, some authors have conducted statistical studies of blogs. Kumar et al. (2004) analyze 1.3 million bloggers and the individual entries of some 25,000 blogs, and their paper reveals the demographics, friendships, and activity patterns of bloggers over time. They also find that America, Canada, England, Russia, and Australia have the largest number of bloggers in the web space, and the blog community mainly consists of bloggers who share the same interests. Herring at al. (2004) conducted a quantitative study on 203 randomly selected blogs and found that most of the authors are young adult males residing in the United States, and most of the blogs are personal journal type.

Content of Blogs: Just as one person is different from another, so are different bloggers. Stauffer (2002) believes a blog can be a personal site, a political site, a community site, a grassroots organizational site, an education site, and a collaborative site for one's project group or company. Horrocks (2003) mentions five types of blogs: daily thoughts, interesting things bloggers find online, thought-provoking comments (i.e., opinions on current events or issues), family blogs and information blogs. Nardi et al. (2004) classify blogs into five categories: blogs as journal, as commentary, as catharsis, as muse and as community forum. Although some blog sites are devoted to politics and technical punditry, an overwhelming majority of them are personal communication and expression (Nardi et al. 2004; Rosenbloom 2004; Stone 2004). Teden and Allen (2005) believe blogs can be used for "announcements, event calendars, knowledge exchange, or topical commentaries…" Generally, readers of different tastes can always find their favourite blogs.

Reasons for Blogging: Why do people blog? Different bloggers may answer differently. Easy to use, free of charge, and fashion are main factors. Dvorak (2002) thinks people blog mainly for the following reasons: to satisfy one's ego gratification, to demonstrate individuality, to vent frustration with day-to-day life, to share human need and to practice writing skills. Mortensen et al. (2002) think that weblogs are not always in accordance with the authorities, weblogs allow single, small and even fragmentary thoughts to be documented easily and quickly, and webloggers usually would not edit their blogs once they are "published". Blogs bring true democracy to grassroots Internet users, everyone now has an equal voice (Stone 2004), and the key issue is how to make it loud enough to be heard. Kilne and Burstein (2005) believe the ultimate product of blogging is "empowerment", or put it another way, "I blog, therefore I am." Zhang (2004) believes that the main purpose of sex bloggers in China (such as MZM) is to become famous and then to earn money; the author argues that the sex blog is a challenge to Chinese traditional sex literature as well as traditional moral standards.

Blog as a Two-way Communication: A human being is a gregarious social animal with the impulse to share thoughts with others, and the desire to receive attention, find comfort and acceptance from others (Kilne and Burstein 2005). On the other hand, a human being has the inborn curiosity to learn about others by probing into their deep mind. A blog provides exactly such a platform through which bloggers can communicate with readers. Many bloggers want to get feedback from readers, and the comments may stimulate them to give further consideration on issues worth talking about. The hits one receives may embody to a certain extent the popularity of his blogs. Reading one's blogs would give the readers a chance to identify his or her personality (Stauffer 2002; Nardi et al. 2004; Stone 2004; Efimova et al. 2005). While adolescents in the past would hide their private experiences into a locked drawer, young bloggers prefer to share their sorrow and joy with others; yet one medium will not necessarily take precedence over the other (Kitzmann 2003; Nussbaum 2004). Hewitt (2005) believes that the more hits one attracts, the better role his blogs will play as an agent of persuasion or dissemination. While privacy is a pivotal feature of the traditional diary, the issue is somewhat ambiguous for the blog: an abundance of personal information could be found in one's blog (Dijck 2004; Rodi 2005).

How to Improve Blog Traffic: Receiving more hits and comments is what most bloggers dream of, but how to realize the dream is a problem. Blogging requires time, energy and enthusiasm. Once one begins blogging, one should devote time to writing regularly. Bloggers should have some ideas to communicate with readers; accurate grammar and spelling are also preferred (Stauffer 2002). There are many ways to improve traffic, such as enabling comment function, linking to other bloggers, leaving comments on them, referring to them in one's own posts, or submitting one's site manually to major specialized search engines such as Searchblogger.com (Teden and Allen 2005). With the exception of a few top bloggers, most ordinary bloggers have little chance to be noticed by others. An overwhelming majority of blogs remains unknown to most readers. Herring at al. (2004) are surprised to find that both blog links to other contents and readers' comments on blog entries in their 203 randomly selected blogs are not as many as popularly believed. Power-law is a relationship between two variables, and one variable is proportional to the power of the other. For example, a very small number of the population in society possesses a disproportionate amount of health. Traditional power-law is also applicable to blogosphere, namely, a very small number of blogs gets the majority of the traffic (Shirky 2003; Teden and Allen 2005).

Community Blogs: People sharing the same interests or working on the same project can create community blogs. Organizations and institutions of various kinds may also create community blogs. Clyde (2004) believes that the purposes of community blogs include, but are not limited to:

> Publicity and promotion, sharing of information or knowledge management with an organization, communicating with clients or the local community, influencing public opinions, testing products or ideas, or creating opportunity for assessing public opinion (Clyde 2004).

Carter (2005) conducts a study on an intellectual property community blog that consists of eight participants; and the contributors of the community blogs agree that a good post is one that contributes to an issue under discussion.

Media Coverage on Blogs: The number of bloggers around the world increases at an astronomical speed. Consequently, mass media give more and more attention to this phenomenon. Clyde (2004) conducted a statistical study of the articles mentioning weblogs or blogging in *New York Times* (USA), *Boston Guide* (USA), Canadian newspaper database and *The Times* (UK), and found that while the numbers are 0, 0, 3, and 0 respectively in 1998, in 2002, the number increased sharply to 128, 63, 195, and 27 respectively.

Negative Opinion of Blogs: Of course not everybody expresses favourable attitudes towards blogs. Cross (2000) argues that speed and accessibility of blogs as an online private publishing activity means that true creative writings do not play a dominating role, because blogging mainly "is a gold rush of instant catharsis and quasi-fame." Clyde (2004) tells readers to be cautious about the contents of blogs, and to take the following criteria into consideration before accepting the information: who is responsible for the content? What is the intended scope and coverage? How accurate is the information? The content of many blogs is boring and narcissistic, and "critics call reading blogs is being forced to look at your friends scrapbooks – a bunch of meaningless, personal junk" (Stone 2004). Weiss (2004) criticizes blogs as "merely a receptacle...a wastebasket," and he believes that content of blogs is insignificantly temporal and fickle beliefs that are not worth reading.

Blogging Technique: Experts in computing science attach great importance to technical issues of blogs: what kind of blogging software should programmers develop to make it easy and convenient for bloggers to use? In fact, technique on blogging has already undergone significant changes. While in the past only web gurus can create link-driven websites, present user-friendly blogging software makes blogging no longer a dream for technology laymen. The functions of weblog software are more and more complex as time goes by (Blood 2000, 2004). For example, readers can comment on the content of the blogs, and the permalinks give each blog entry a permanent location to be referenced. Nardi et al. (2004) give some pieces of advice on how to make further improvement on blogging software. Efimova et al.

(2005) point out some technological problems that may hinder weblog conversation, such as the distributed and fragmented nature of the conversation, lack of bi-directional links, and lack of tracking technology. Parker et al. (2005) indicate that there are some technical limitations in video blogging. In a word, new forms of blogging will appear gradually with the development of modern technology.

2.2 Blogs in Journalism

Blogs play an ever-increasing role in journalism. The scandal between Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky was first released in the blogs of Matt Drudge in 1998. The 9/11 terrorism attacks and the Iraq War play the role of catalyst in the rapid growth of grassroots blogs.

General Discussion: The impact of webblogging on journalism is widely discussed (Regan 2003; Welch et al. 2003). Rosenbloom (2004) believes that bloggers differ obviously from the traditional press: professional journalists have to follow the instruction of editors, and they need to maintain a professional reputation so that sources will continue to talk to them. Some scholars believe that blogs could somehow play the role of journalism. Both Blood (2003) and Rosenbloom (2004) regard blogs as "participatory media" and believe that they differ from traditional journalism. Grabowicz (2003) comments that participatory journalism is likely to become the norm in the future, and that inviting informed readers to participate in stories could bolster journalists' credibility and trust. Lasica (2003) believes blogs can help journalists to regain public trust and emphasizes the benefits that weblogs bring to journalism. Bloggers can play the role of collective fact-checking to the stories reported, and increasing comments made by readers to some errors in a certain piece of news may even "attract the attention of media giants like the *New York Times*" (Stone 2004).

Text blogs can be regarded as a supplementary news source to traditional newspapers and magazines; mobile blogs and video blogs can play the role of radio and TV to a certain degree. Parker et al. (2005) introduce video blogging to readers and regard it as an additional source for information not available in official TV news.

As to what bloggers should or should not write in blogs, Wendland (2003) points out that bloggers are entitled to claim all the benefits of the First Amendment and are eligible for statutory protection. However, Olafson (2003) warns bloggers to be prudent about their writings: an American journalist lost his job because he blogged a piece of news without getting permission from his boss.

Criticism on Blogs: Even though blogs and journalism are closely related, some scholars think that they are different in nature. Allbritton (2003) warns us that excessive freedom could encourage carelessly conceived statements and baseless charges. He thinks every blogger would benefit from having an editor and from knowing a little bit about the way journalism is produced. Andrews (2003) holds the opinion that even though reportorial contributions have been made by the web generation, it is fair to say the vast majority of blogs does not qualify as journalism. Gillmore (2003) criticizes the contents of many blogs as inauthentic. Shirky (2003) argues that top blogs are more like broadcast outlets; such bloggers usually are overwhelmed by the tremendous number of comments and incoming emails, and hence are not able to participate in the conversation with readers. Davis (2005) warns that readers should be careful about the reliability of blogs as "bloggers have come under criticism as self-absorbed and lacking the respect and standards of the traditional news media."

Relationship between Blogs and Traditional Media: The relationship between blogs and traditional media is very complex. Can blogs be regarded as a new form of mass media, and if so, will blogs finally take the place of traditional media? What is the attitude of conservative journalists towards blogs? How could bloggers get shocking news if they do not resort to traditional media? Will some famous bloggers finally join the traditional media and hence further strengthen the bureaucracy of traditional media that they once condemned? All these questions deserve our attention.

Drezner et al. (2004) regard blogs as an alternative source of news and commentary to readers, especially in countries where traditional media are under the control of the government. Obstacles still exist to the influence of blogs: on the one hand, bloggers have limited resources at their disposal and they have to resort to traditional media; on the other hand, today's successful bloggers may become the traditional journalists tomorrow because "as more mainstream media outlets hire bloggers to provide content, they become more integrated into politics as usual"

(Drezner et al. 2004). Kilne and Burstein (2005) believe that some of today's top bloggers may "become newspaper and magazine columnists and TV news talents." Stone (2002) believes there is no absolute answer to the question whether bloggers are journalists or not, and he argues that "A blog is whatever you make of it. It is not so much the content that makes a blog –it's the structure."

Welch (2003) thinks the contributions by ordinary bloggers to journalism lie mainly in four aspects: personality (people's opinions are much more diversified than the ones expressed in the traditional media), eyewitness testimony, editorial filtering, and uncounted gigabytes of new knowledge. Sullivan (2004) does not believe the popularity of blogs means the death of old media, because ordinary bloggers have to "depend on the journalistic resources of big media to do the bulk of reporting and analysis." The author also admits that bloggers could contribute something to traditional media by adding "new voices, new perspectives and new facts every minute." Newspapers and news organizations also use weblogs as information sources, Clyde (2004) regards the relationship between weblogs and print media as "if not necessarily mutually dependent, then at least allies." Kilne and Burstein (2005) believe that bloggers and mainstream journalists should strive to achieve double-win, and they would "probably continue to deepen the symbiotic relationship already established by reporters sourcing story ideas from bloggers and bloggers in turn referencing and linking to the new stories reporters write."

Although some scholars believe that blogs and mass media can exist harmoniously, blogs do bring challenges to traditional media. Theoretically speaking, every blogger can be a journalist now. Some most popular blogs such as Instapundit.com and Dailykos.com may attract tens of thousands of hits every day, especially during the period when a sudden or great event happens. For example, during the crucial US presidential election period in August 2004, "the ten most popular political blogs collectively had 28 million visits from readers, which rivaled traffic to the three 24/7 online cable news networks," and the popular liberal blog DailyKos.com "drew 7 million reader visits alone that month, which beat Fox News's 5.7 million online visits" (Kilne and Burstein 2005). Ordinary bloggers, who now have the ability and authority to distribute text, are posing a challenge to the old communication system once tightly controlled by the elite class (Orihuela 2003; Hewitt 2005). Stone (2004) believes that bloggers will have a major development in the future, and they would "take the media out of corporate hands and give them to the people."

Media's Blogs: Many big media companies provide blogs to readers as an alternative form of information channel. Stone (2002) list some famous media which offer public blogs to readers, such as FoxNews.com, *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Guardian* (UK), MSNBC, *American Prospect*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *National Review*. Kilne and Burstein (2005) predict that almost all of today's traditional media will develop blogs "to extend their reach, connect to the younger demographic, be able to expand their coverage and have more advertising product to sell." The authors believe that newspaper readers could participate in news reportage by working as "citizen journalists." Alterman (2003) believes that blogs created by journalists could bridge the gap between them and readers, and blogs can be a forum for their work that invites feedback for each story they write. Mitchell (2003) comments that weblogs are providing journalists with more edge--helping them show more personality, style and immediacy than they might have ever displayed in their regular reports.

2.3 Blogs in Politics

Many bloggers appeared shortly after the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks, and 'warblogs' emerged after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Blogs created in response to major events could provide new perspectives that are not available in conventional media, because the stories were written without any outside pressure being applied (Reynolds 2003; Clyde 2004). Stone (2004) dates back the historical evolution of political bloggers, saying that "they were called warbloggers originally, but as time has gone on they evolved into the broader political realm." Drezner et al. (2004) point out that blogs are already influencing U.S. politics and "the top five political blogs together attract over half a million visitors per day." Davis (2005) uses the example of Instapundit.com, which "attracts over seventy thousand visitors a day," to argue that political blogs are widely read now and some top ones are regarded as authoritative information sources.

Politicians use blogs for various purposes such as announcement forums, propaganda tools, fund-raising vehicles, opinion research platform, or grassroots mobilizing engines, etc. (Whitney 2004; Davis 2005). The role of blogs in political campaigns could not be overestimated; the huge amount of money raised for candidates "changed the contours of citizen political participation, and altered the course of the 2004 presidential election" (Hewitt 2005).

Authorities should not neglect the power of blogs, because political opinions from some bloggers may spread rapidly in the vast blogosphere, and then influence other citizens, and finally determine the fate of votes on some national policies. Kilne and Burstein (2005) believe that "political blogs have in many ways transformed politics from a spectator sport into a participatory one." There are numerous examples of how blogs are changing politics around the globe. A most convincing one happened in France: Etienne Chouard, a schoolteacher from Marseille who ran an anti-constitution site, was widely credited with inspiring the opposition vote against the European constitution in France in May 2005. In America, Senator Trent Lott's remark on racial segregation was first discussed by political bloggers, which then aroused the attention of mass media. It is the political bloggers who finally forced Trent Lott's resignation as the Senate Republican Leader on December 20, 2002. Stone (2004) believes blogging empowers everyone, no matter whether he is a liberal, conservative, libertarian, or anarchist.

The opinion of political bloggers is not necessarily republican or democratic; it can cover the whole political spectrum (Stauffer 2002). Kilne and Burstein (2005) believe that since some voting citizens are dissatisfied with the limited choice offered by the two main political parties, political leaders could use blogs to "mobilize them into a collective voting bloc sizable enough to sustain the launch of a viable third political party." Clyde (2004) warns that blogs maintained by a certain party may not present a balanced or unbiased view on certain political issues; hence readers should read them with a critical mind. Grossman and Hamilton (2004) believe wise readers should be open to bloggers of different political views; otherwise "we could end up with a nation of political solipsists, vacuum sealed in our private feedback loops, never exposed to new arguments..."

Willams et al. (2005) discuss the different roles of websites and blogs during the 2004 US presidential campaign: while blogs aim at "personalizing" the candidate and establishing informal yet friendly relationships with the audience, websites mainly deal with the candidate's position on political issues, hence blogs can be considered as "soft" campaigning and web sites as "hard" campaigning. Different candidates may use blogs for different purposes: Kerry's campaign blog was an open forum where dissenters could present their views; while the Bush campaign blog was used as an opportunity for supporters to hear from the campaign leader (Davis 2005).

2.4 Blogs in Education

Content of Education Blogs: Many scholars comment on the role of blogs in education. Blogs can be used by teachers and students to do many things: to replace standard class web pages, to link Internet items related to courses, to organize in-class discussions, to organize class seminars, and to provide summaries of readings

(Downes 2004). Of course, students can even use blogs to submit assignments online (Stauffer 2002). Stone (2002) believes blogs can work well as knowledge management systems; and bloggers can search the archives quickly, accurately, and conveniently.

Influence of Blogs on Teachers and Students: Blogs can be applied in education to facilitate the communication and collaboration between students and teachers outside the classroom (Weiler 2003; Cylde 2005; Hastings et al. 2005). The efficiency of teachers can be greatly improved by blogging (Baggaley 2004; Embrey 2002; Ferdig et al. 2004; Zhang 2005). Stiler et al. (2003) find that blogs maintained by preservice teachers can play a significant role in improving their reflective ability.

In the traditional classroom, due to time limitations, not every student has equal opportunity to have their voice heard; this is especially true for silent and introverted students. Blogs provide a remedy to address the problem by empowering students to communicate more freely (Richardson 2003; Stone 2004). Dickey (2004) finds blogs can alleviate the feelings of isolation, distress and frustration on the part of distance education learners. Huffaker (2004) maintains that both traditional literacy and digital literacy are important and blogging provides a perfect platform for students to improve such abilities. Martin et al. (2005) conduct telephone interviews on e-learning students who blogged during a course and find that an overwhelming majority of them regards blogging as a very positive, interesting and useful component of their studies. Teaching and exposing students to blogs can help them to acquire the subjectivity necessary for engagement in rational-critical debate, and to enhance the development of their reflectivity (Stiler et al. 2003; Downes 2004; Ferdig et al. 2004; Barton 2005). McKiernan (2005) introduces several common educational blog resources to readers. Dong and Yu (2005) suggest that Chinese university students can use blogs to practice their English writing.

Higgins et al. (2004) describe the implementation process of blogging software at the University of Maryland, and mention some policy issues that have to be taken into consideration, such as acceptable use, privacy, users, terms of use, evaluations, training and user support. Stiler et al. (2003) believed students should use discretion in writing about sensitive, personal subjects in their blogs.

Library Blogs: Librarians can create blogs to promote services or to provide a means of communication with clients. Crawford (2003) regards weblogs as a non-traditional writing practice form for librarians to build their reputation and serve the field. The content of their blogs can be public diaries or be citations in certain fields. Clyde (2004) finds that while there are quite a large number of useful and well-regarded weblogs maintained by librarians, blogs maintained by libraries are not so popular. His research shows that in 2003, there are only 48, 6 and 3 libraries that blog in USA, Canada and UK respectively. It seems that many libraries have not realized the importance and convenience of blogging.

2.5 Blogs in Business

Blogs are widely used by big corporations to publicize products, bridge the gap between customers/suppliers, manage team works and demonstrate company's expertise (Barnett 2004; Stone 2004). One of the first major companies officially using blogs as a corporate communication solution was Macromedia (Stone 2002). However, blogs on sensitive research and product development will be confined to the corporation's Intranet only (Stone 2002; Orr 2004). Dearstyne (2005) classifies the content of business blogs into five categories: individuals' personal news/views, news/commentary/journalism, promotional/marketing/customer services, business/ professional issue commentary and insight, and internal information sharing/knowledge management applications. Since blogging is easy and blogging software is free of charge, it can save the expenditure of enterprises. Updating a blog is also much cheaper and quicker than updating a website (Stone 2004).

2.6 Conclusion

The above-mentioned scholars contribute significantly to the scholarship on blogs. Yet almost all the studies are on American blogs; research on bloggers from other countries is not yet popular. Being Chinese, I would like to read more articles on Chinese bloggers. Although an overwhelming majority of blogs are personal online diaries, it is a pity to say that academic studies on ordinary bloggers are far from enough, still less is the comparative study on the content of ordinary bloggers in different countries. Will different politics, cultures, ideologies, and social values play significant roles in determining the content of ordinary bloggers in different countries? The issue will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: MZM—How Blogging Became Fashionable in China

The content of the Internet is multifaceted and one can find almost any kind of information wanted. Information on sex is almost infinite on the Internet. Rosetti (2006) warns us that in the year 2002, "web sites that peddled pornography and sex were the largest income generators of the Internet, exceeding both computer hardware sales and software sales." The pornography statistics show that "porn revenue is larger than all combined revenues of all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises, and the US porn revenue exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC (6.2 billion).[8] The same statistics also show that the number of pornography websites is 4.2 million, and they consist of 12% of the total websites. Then how about the proportion of sex blogs among all the blogs on the Internet? Clyde (2004) believes that since "a considerable portion of the world wide web is devoted to sex sites, so sex blogs (of various kind) seem to account for a considerable proportion of weblogs." Stone (2004) also mentions a famous female blogger on sex in London with the pen name of Belle de Jour, the woman is well known to others by her sex blogs, and she even managed to sign a book deal and a film contract. It seems that sex is a popular blog topic. In this chapter, I will focus on Muzi Mei ("MZM" for abbreviation. Chinese name: 木子美) and American blogger Jessica Cutler. Both of them became known for their sex blogs.

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[8] http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html

3.1 Case Study of "MZM Phenomenon"

In America, Matt Drudge disclosed Bill Clinton's sex scandal in his blog in 1998, which played an important role in promoting the popularity of blogs.[9] In China, however, the boom of blogging originated from an otherwise unknown female Internet user--MZM, who probably never thought that "a single post in the blogosphere can effect real-world change" (Stone, 2004).

In China, Blogchina.com, the first blog hosting website, began to offer free services to the public in August 2002. At that time, blogging was known only to a small number of web gurus. It was not until the appearance of the "Muzimei Phenomenon" that blogging became popular among the ordinary netizens.

MZM is the pen name of a young female fashion magazine columnist in Guangzhou. Before the sudden and rapid popularity of her online diaries, she was already famous in local cultural and music circles for her idiosyncratic writing style--"writing with the body," in other words, she mainly talked about sex in her articles. On June 19, 2003, she published her personal diaries in Blogcn.com, one of the earliest blog hosting services in China. In the posts, she revealed her detailed sexual experiences with different men. Consequently, her blogs attracted the attention of thousands of netizens. After revealing the real name of a famous rock-and-roll star with whom she had relations, hits on her blogs increased exponentially. While the hits to her blog numbered about 19,000 in June 2003; on October 12, the hits increased to

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[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matt_Drudge Data retrieved on March 1, 2006.

63,309; and by November 4, they increased to 122,000; and then jumped to a historical high of 162,682 by November 14, 2003.[10] Her blogs were temporarily shut down because Blogcn.com, the Chinese service provider, couldn't handle the millions of visitors.

Sina.com, the largest portal website in China, began to serialize her blogs in November 2003. Other websites followed suit. Newspapers began to publish features on MZM; many scholars began to analyze the social phenomenon from different aspects. MZM was synonymous with bloggers in China, and "木子美" became the most popular word in search engines in China at that time. Table 3.1 shows the search results of key word "木子美" in four search engines. (Search time: December 22, 2004, search word: "木子美". The reasons for me to choose the following four websites are as follows: Google.com is the most authoritative search engine on the Internet, Baidu.com is the largest Chinese search engine, Blogchina.com is the first blog hosting website in China, and Blogcn.com is the website where MZM's blogs are hosted).

Table 3.1 Search Results of "木子美" in Four Search Engines

Search Engine	www.google.com	www.baidu.com	www.blogchina.com	www.blogcn.com
Results	130,000	257,000	648	1,180

However, in China, a socialist country where "sex" has always been a taboo in public, MZM's blogs with lurid details about sex immediately caused indignation of many readers. All possible harsh and abusive words were poured on her. Some readers supported her behavior, and said that although her excessive indulgence in sensual pleasure should not be advocated, her behavior was understandable and she had the right to do what she wanted to do. Table 3.2 shows the data on readers' different responses.[11]

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[10] http://news.xinhuanet.com/book/2003-11/14/content_1178496_2.htm

Table 3.2 Numbers of Readers' Comments on MZM

Total Comments	91
Repetitive Comments	2
Comments that criticize MZM	32
Comments that support MZM	20
Comments that show understanding yet not support of her behavior	37

The following table and corresponding diagram show the comments on MZM in November 2003, when her blog was most popular. The data show that as time went on, readers gradually lost interest in commenting on her blog.

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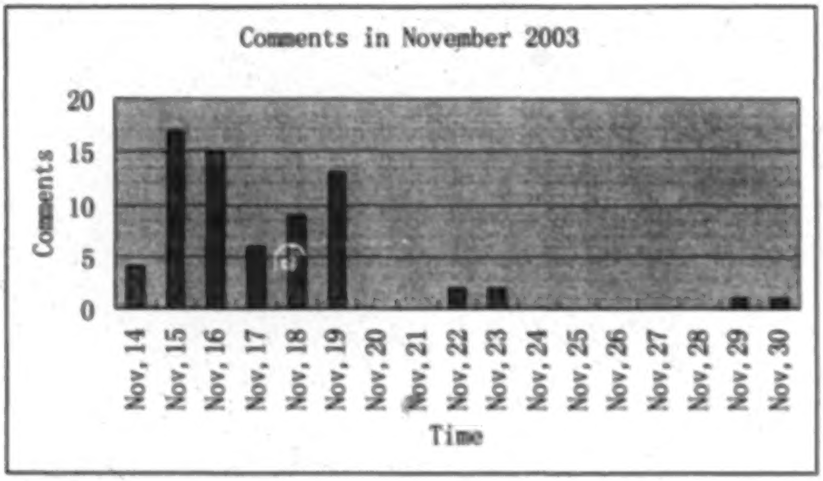
[11] The data were collected from the discussion board of Xinhuanet.com, the website of official Xinhua News Agency. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/book/2003-11/14/content_1178496.htm. Click "Read Comments" to read the comments of readers on MZM.

Table 3.3 Numbers of Comments on MZM in November 2003

Date (November2003)	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Comments	4	17	15	6	9	13	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1

Diagram 3.1 Numbers of Comments on MZM in November 2003

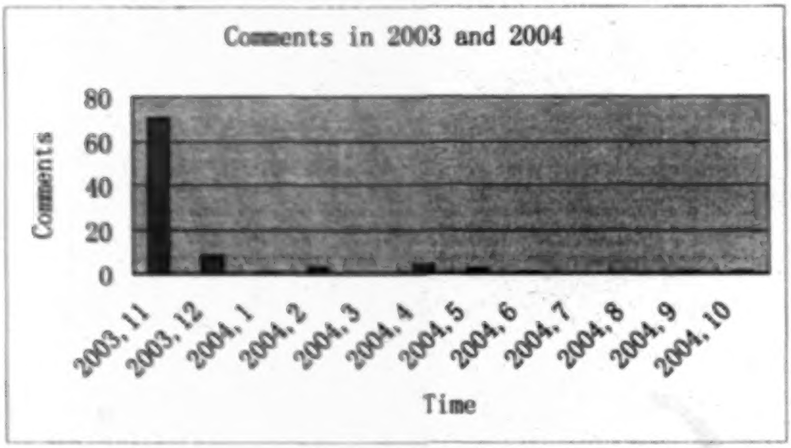


In terms of readers' responses to MZM during the following months, refer to the following table and corresponding diagram:

Table 3.4 Numbers of Comments on MZM in Different Months

Time (MM/YY)	11/03	12/03	1/04	2/04	3/04	4/04	5/04	6/04	7/04	8/04	9/04	10/04
Comments	70	8	1	3	0	4	2	1	0	0	1	1

Diagram 3.2 Numbers of Comments on MZM in Different Months



The above-mentioned conclusion is further supported by the data: as time passed, MZM gradually lost her popularity among readers.

Under severe pressure from readers, MZM had to delete her posts on November 4, 2003. Even though she managed to make them available to the public again in a few days, time did not move in her favor. On November 18, 2003, she deleted all her posts and also resigned from her job.

An important question to ask is why MZM could cause such a big stir on the Internet. One reason is that China experienced a long history of feudalism. In China, sex is a sensitive topic and few people would like to talk about it publicly. MZM's publicly libidinous behavior is completely at odds with Chinese traditional social values and moral standards. Hence her blog caused anger among many netizens. Another important reason for her popularity lies in the blog itself. A blog is an empowering tool through which ordinary people can express themselves freely. In feudal China, only rich people had access to education, and the thoughts of the elite class were expressed and passed down in the form of books. Ordinary people's thoughts can only spread by word of mouth; hence the audience is understandably limited. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, puritanism was enforced, and it went to extreme during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). People at that time were encouraged to focus their energy on work rather than enjoyment of life. For example, if people dared to read foreign love novels or sing foreign love songs in public, they would be strongly criticized for aspiring for the "bourgeois decadent life style". During that period, personal thoughts gave way to collective thoughts. In other words, ordinary people have no way to have their voice heard by others. Empty talk dominated the so-called "political life meeting", in which participants had to their recent "thoughts development tendency". If we take such historical context into consideration, it would not be difficult to understand the "MZM Phenomenon": for the first time in history, ordinary Chinese people have access to potentially numerous readers around the world. Through the new medium, the blogger and readers can communicate freely and conveniently.

3.2 Followers of MZM

Information spreads extremely fast on the Internet, and with its help, ordinary people can become famous overnight. Many ordinary people cherish the dream that one day they could be in the spotlights of media. Being a celebrity means one could obtain financial benefits easier than ordinary people. For example, MZM had her abridged blogs published, though later her book was forbidden to circulate by the authorities. At the same time, one's vanity-- the very inborn weakness of the human being-- could be satisfied if he or she is in the limelight. MZM is the forerunner of avant-garde nonconformists advocating "writing with body," but she is by no means the last one. Other female bloggers followed suit and they spare no efforts in attracting high traffic to their blogs. The followers know very well that if they want to outdistance MZM, they must go even further: just talking about sex could not meet the ever-increasing curiosity of avid Internet users, nude photos could be a magic weapon to win attention from the public.

No wonder before the fervent debates on MZM calmed down, a new female blogger appeared with the pen name of Zhuying Qingtong (literal translation: Bamboo shadow green pupil). She received her Master's degree in Aesthetics at Xiamen University, one of the most prestigious universities of China. As of January 5, 2004, she began to put her nearly naked pictures in her blogs. The hits increased to 130 thousand in one month.[12] It appears that she suffered almost the same fate as MZM: she was condemned bitterly by readers and the Webmaster deleted her pictures. As a result, she decided to move her blogs to another website, but before doing that, she put a notice in her blogs saying that she would accept interviews on the condition that she is paid for that. She created her own website and one needs to pay a certain amount of money to subscribe to her blogs, but later her website could not be accessed for some undetermined reason.

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[12] http://news.sohu.com/2004/02/18/01/news219120147.shtml

In September 2004, Furong Jiejie (literal translation: Sister Lotus), a young woman who failed three times in the graduate entrance examination, began uploading farcical pictures highlighting her S-shaped curves in a famous BBS, with brief narcissistic descriptions about her body, her writings, and her so-called "elegant" dance. She gradually became famous on the Internet. Later, she created her blogs that immediately attracted tens of thousands of hits.

In May 2005, Liumangyan, a female blogger, began to put her nearly naked pictures in her blogs. She had experiences similar to her forerunners: a large number of hits, and tumult arose on the Internet debating whether her pictures are "pornographic" or "artistic".

In July 2005, Mumu, a dance girl working for a video chatroom website, began to post sexy pictures in her blogs. Within a month, the hits to her blog climbed to over 50,000, which is an outstanding achievement for personal blogs.

One should not be surprised by the fact that each of these famous bloggers tries her best to outwit the others. They look down upon each other and sometimes criticize each other in their blogs; the verbal battles among them make the already chaotic blogosphere even more turbulent.

I searched the names of the five bloggers in *pinyin* and Chinese characters respectively in Google.com on February 8, 2006, and obtained the following data:

Table 3.5 WebPages Statistics on the Five Female Bloggers

Name	WebPages in English		WebPages in Chinese	
	Original results	Most relevant results	Original results	Most relevant results
MZM	10,200	321	287,000	703
Zhuying Qingtong	333	26	35,300	454
Furong Jiejie	152	42	1,950,000	787
Liumangyan	495	60	424,000	513
Mumu	110	47	4,210	349

The data show that being the first well-known female blogger in China, MZM attracted more attention than her followers in English reports; she was even reported on by the *New York Times* and she was invited to join a panel judging a blogs contest in Germany. As to the Chinese reports, Furong Jiejie received even more attention than MZM, while the others lagged far behind. Here I would like to emphasize that Furong Jiejie's blog is quite different from those of the others: she talks nothing about indecent topics, she just could not give herself a proper recognition, and overestimated her beauty and dance, which aroused strong enthusiasm from readers. Some readers regard her as a clown befooling herself in order to win a laugh from the audience. The data show that readers are much more interested in Furong Jiejie's blogs than these on sex.

Chinese Internet users at the present time are much more sensible and tolerant than they were two years ago: all the five bloggers can talk freely in their private writing spaces and no one would interrupt them now. This fact suggests that progress in freedom of speech has been made in China. I visited their blogs and collected the following data on February 8, 2006.

Table 3.6 Statistics on the Five Bloggers

Name	Email availability	Total posts	Total comments	Total hits	Blogroll available
MZM	N	60	387	※	5
Zhuying Qingtong	Y	102	1,328	218,468	10
Furong Jiejie	Y	36	14,454	1,586,782	0
Liumangyan	Y	137	1,968	279,305	40
Mumu	Y	173	1,197	303,470	413

(※ Total hits number on MZM's blog is not available)

In 2006, MZM definitely was not as popular as she used to be, since readers seem to be more interested in the blogs of new nonconformists appearing from time to time, which can be seen from the numbers of comments on the five bloggers. Compared with blogs on sex, readers seem to be more enthusiastic about the blogs of Furong

Jiejie who is ridiculously intoxicated with her own look.

But MZM would not easily retire from blogging and she would not let her followers beat her easily. Fearing that she would probably be buried into oblivion in the blogsophere as time goes on, MMZ began her Podcasting from August 8, 2005, and most of the contents are still on sex. History seems to repeat again: her audio blogs again become a hot topic on the Internet, and one specific audio file on her sex with a man was downloaded tens of thousands of time.

It is hard to predict what actions other unknown bloggers would take if they want to become famous overnight on the Internet. The way of telling sex stories in personal blogs corresponds with blogging technology development: we first have text, then we have pictures, then we have audio files, so what is the next step? Will MZM or other nonconformists take the next logical actions to show sex videos to the public? No one knows; in modern Chinese society where individualism is worshipped by young people, everything is possible.

3.3 Celebrities' Blogs

Even though the five female bloggers caused big stirs in the blogosphere, they are now far outshone by blogs of famous stars. For example, as of March 3, 2006, the hits to the blogs of Xu Jinglei, a very famous actress in China is 14,712,039, yet she just began blogging on October 31, 2005. In China the year 2005 is the year of celebrity blogs, and several hundred blogs written by famous actors, actress, singers, athletics, writers, scholars, businessmen, and influential persons in the IT field appeared like the bamboo shoots after a spring rain. Sina.com and Sohu.com, two most important portal websites in China, competed with each other aggressively to solicit stars to host blogs in their websites. The other websites also followed suit. Stars blogging is a triple-win strategy: stars, websites and readers all benefit from it. First, most ordinary readers are curious about the private lives of stars, and blogs provide a channel for them to know about their idols. At the same time, star fans can use blogs to communicate with their icons. Secondly, blogs give celebrities the chance to share thoughts with readers, and a large number of hits also improve their reputation significantly. They will certainly gain financial benefits from it, because few celebrities would be noble enough to spend valuable time updating their blogs while earning nothing from it. Thirdly, by hosting the blogs of celebrities, websites could definitely earn a large amount of money, since the more hits the websites attract, the more income they would acquire from advertisers.

3.4 Comparison of MZM with Jessica Cutler

Since China is a country with strong traditional conservative morals on sex, MZM and her followers' bitter experiences are understandable and predictable. Then I could not help asking the following questions: what is the fate of famous sex bloggers in America? Do they suffer consequences similar to those of MZM?

Talking about female sex bloggers in America, we should not forget Jessica Cutler, a former congressional staff assistant. In her blogs in early 2004, she revealed her sex relations with different people, including a high level Republican. Jessica's blog immediately caused chaos on Capitol Hill. When her identity was finally revealed, she was fired by the senator for whom she worked. However, Jessica Cutler made profit from having her book published in June 2005 entitled *The Washingtonienne: A Novel*, which was based on her sex blogs. But the female blogger is in trouble now: Robert Steinbuch, a staff attorney with whom she had relations, filed a suit against her for revealing his name in her blogs.

In the following pages, I compare the similarities and differences between MZM and Jessica Cutler.

3.4.1 Similarities

Many Internet users both in China and America are interested in gossip, especially the sensational news on celebrities. Since MZM revealed the real name of a famous rock-and-roll star, and Jessica Cutler talked about her relations with one high official in the Bush administration, they both immediately became the focus of public attention. In fact, it is mainly due to the involvement with celebrities that both MZM and Jessica Cutler became notorious overnight, even though they might not have wanted to become a public figure through blogging. Of course, mass media both in China and America also played very important roles in spreading such sensational news. For example, MZM's blogs were serialised in Sina.com and the *Washington Post* also covered a report on Jessica Cutler.[13] Even though they now are not as popular as they used to be, both of them are still blogging.

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[13] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A48909-2004May22.html

3.4.2 Differences

Although MZM and Jessica Cutler shared some similar experiences, their fates are different in several aspects. First, their roles in blogging history in each country are different. MZM is the first well-known female sex blogger in China, and it is because of MZM that ordinary people came to know blogs. However, Jessica Cutler's historical role in American is not as important as that of MZM in China, because when the Jessica Cutler scandal happened, blogs have already become very popular in America.

MZM became famous because she was the first blogger who dared to tell her sexual experiences in her blogs, as sex is a very sensitive topic in China and few people would talk about it in public. Of course, revealing the name of a rock-and-roll star added further fuel to the flames. However, Americans are more open as far as sex is concerned. Jessica Cutler became famous mainly because of her sex with ordinary staff or high officials on Capitol Hill, the very serious political centre of America. The government may have regarded it as a shame that this kind of thing would happen among the government civil servants, so I think that the involvement of famous politicians in this scandal rather than sexual topics itself made Jessica Cutler famous.

MZM suffered a lot of revilement from readers, but the criticisms were mainly from the perspective of social morals rather than from laws: many readers felt that men's dominating role in society was challenged by MZM. The laws in China are still far from perfect and complete, especially when compared with those in America. In

China, human behaviours sometimes are regulated by social morals rather than by laws. However, America is a country governed by laws. Jessica Cutler was fired not because of her promiscuous sex relations, but because of her "unacceptable use of Senate computers to post unsuitable and offensive material to an Internet Weblog."[14] There are far fewer civil law suits in China than in America, and ordinary Chinese sometimes are reluctant to take legal action to protect their rights; they would rather settle issues by themselves. So it is not difficult to understand that while Robert Steinbuch filed a suit against Jessica Cutler for violating his privacy, the Chinese rock-and-roll star just kept silent on the issue. The star has to weigh the benefits of a lawsuit against its costs, because he knows that a lawsuit would only bring him more unwanted publicity.

Both MZM and Jessica Cutler had their books published, the contents are both based on their blogs, but their books had different fates: the book of MZM was confiscated and not allowed to circulate because the content is regarded as unsuitable for readers. On the contrary, Jessica Cutler's book sells well in America. Hence we can say that censorship in China is far stricter than that in America. Even though censorship is a universal practice, the degree of censorship and the content of censorship may vary from country to country.

There is much information on MZM in English available to western readers; her story was even reported by the *New York Times*.[15] However, there are far fewer reports on Jessica Cutler in China. On March 6, 2006, I searched "Jessica Cutler" in the advanced search box of www.google.com, and I got 71 results in simplified Chinese and 80,500 results in English, the most relevant results are 35 and 541 respectively. Most reports or comments on her are given by Chinese bloggers rather than official news media. To sum it up, MZM is much more famous in the western world than Jessica Cutler is in China.

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[14] http://www.calicocat.com/2004/05/hiring-and-firing-on-capitol-hill.html

3.5 Further Consideration

It is commonly believed that the proportion of sex bloggers in America is not low, then how about the percentage of Chinese sex bloggers? Since no ready statistical data on sex bloggers are available in literature on blogs, it seems worthwhile for me to randomly collect some ordinary bloggers and then analyze their posts. The purpose is to know how many bloggers talk about sex in their posts. More importantly, are there many ordinary bloggers who talk about politics, education or business in their personal blogs because such topics are mentioned frequently in academic articles on blogs? If not, what are they talking about? I will address these questions in chapter four.

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[15] http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/nationworld/2001803958_sexcolumn30.html

Chapter 4: Qualitative Content Analysis of 60 American and 60 Chinese Bloggers

In Chapter 3, I discuss MZM and Jessica Cutler, two well-known female bloggers in China and America respectively. But after all, they are just extreme examples. In order to have a comprehensive and correct understanding of the whole blogosphere, I will deal with the grassroots bloggers who might be our pajama-clad neighbors.

The common feature of a personal blog, be it written by a Chinese or an American, an old man or a young girl, a computer guru or a music lover, a university professor or a primary school student, is universally the same: the blog is a private space. In other words, the blog is just a tool through which bloggers express their thoughts and feelings. Though the format is the same, the contents of bloggers may vary significantly.

In this chapter, I would try to answer the following questions: What are the favorite topics of bloggers? Are there any content differences between bloggers in China and America? What are the proportions of young and old bloggers? Are there more female bloggers than male bloggers or vice versa? Do bloggers worry about their privacy being revealed in their blogs? Do bloggers welcome comments from readers? What measures should bloggers take to attract more hits? Do readers comment a lot or do they just lurk?

To answer these questions, I needed to collect some data and then conduct quantitative study and some preliminary qualitative study on them. But how to collect data is an important issue, because biased data could not reflect the facts of the blogosphere, and may even lead to partial or wrong conclusions.

4.1 Data Collection

As my study objects, I randomly collected 60 American bloggers and 60 Chinese bloggers whose archives include December 2005. There are three reasons for limiting data within such a range: 60 bloggers is the smallest number reasonably acceptable in a quantitative study; another reason is that the data were collected on January 20, 2006, so I decided to choose blogs written in December 2005 because they are the latest; America is the cradle of the blog and has the highest proportion of bloggers around the world, and America represents western culture, the Internet user in China is second only to that in America and China enjoys a big and ever-increasing blogosphere, also China is a socialist country in which the ideology and culture differ significantly from that of America. I want to know whether such ideological and cultural differences could be seen clearly in ordinary people's blogs.

I collected the 60 American bloggers in this way: I opened personal blog http://reonbl.blogspot.com in Blogger.com, and by clicking "NEXT BLOG", the website of a random blogger would show up. By "random" I mean if I click "Back" to my personal website and then click "NEXT BLOG" again, the blog I got this time will be different from the first one.

Collecting 60 bloggers in the vast blogosphere is not as easy as I originally thought, because valid data must meet the following requirements: it must be an individual blog (not a community blog which has more than one contributor), the blogger must be an American, and posts written in as late as December 2005 must be available in the archive. After looking through a lot of websites, I finally got 60 bloggers meeting the conditions. Even though I did not take down the exact number of websites I visited during data collection, I found that most of the blogs are written in English, some are written in French, occasionally I would find some written in Arabic, Japanese, Chinese or other languages.

As to the selection of 60 Chinese bloggers, I used the advanced search function of http://www.search.blogger.com/. In "with all of the words" box, I keyed in "的"(of), one of the most frequently used ancillary words in Chinese; In the "dates" box, I clicked "within anytime"; I searched for the posts written in simplified Chinese, then sorted the search results by date. I accepted any individual Mainland Chinese blogger whose blogging history begins no later than December 2005. Interesting to say is that while the 60 bloggers hosted their posts in Blogger.com, the 60 Chinese bloggers hosted their blogs on MSN space.

4.2 Demographic Study of the 60 American Bloggers

Statistical data can be found in **Appendix A: Demographic Data of the 60 American Bloggers**. Personal information such as age, gender, state or email could be found in the "VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE" section of the blogger. However, since no ready number of total posts, comments and blogroll (the collection of links to other weblogs) are available in the 60 individual websites, I had to count them by hand. Even though I counted the numbers with extreme caution, I have to admit that minor error may still possibly exist. And even though the personal information in one's profile may not be real, I would take it as true for the convenience of analysis.

4.2.1 Privacy Issue

Information such as gender, age, and email could be found in the profile of many bloggers. It seems that bloggers are not reluctant to share personal information with potentially millions of strangers (Miller & Shepherd 2004). In other words, bloggers are not overly concerned about their genuine identity being disclosed on their blogs (Viégas 2005). Among the 60 bloggers, 28 bloggers provide email addresses to readers, which means nearly half of these bloggers do not consider a personal email as very sensitive private information and would like to communicate with the others through email. However, not a single blogger would like to offer other private information such as telephone number or home address in his profile. The possible reason is that email is a one-way communication tool, if one thinks the email received is not worth replying to, he can simply ignore it. However, the telephone is a two-way communication tool; one would usually answer the phone when the bell rings. If one wants to chat with readers through the telephone, he must prepare for the risk of possible telephone harassment. He also risks having telephone solicitors harvest his number for their business or whatsoever purpose.

There are 8 male bloggers who provided personal email addresses to readers, compared with 16 female bloggers, which suggests that female bloggers are more willing to communicate with readers via email. The result of my research also corresponds with the reports of Pew (2005), according to which, "Women send and receive email more than men. Some 94% of online women and 88% of online men use email". The report also finds that "Women are more likely than men to value their email with friends, family, and work colleagues. Women say email improves relations with friends, family, and colleagues more than men do, and that it improves the work climate as well."

4.2.2 Generational Differences

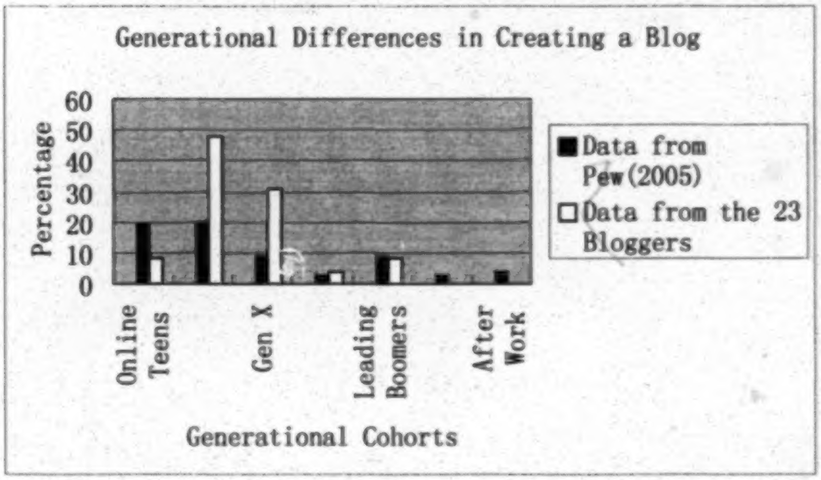
Are there any differences in blogging practice among different generational cohorts? Common knowledge suggests that blogging is mainly a privilege of young people, which can be supported by the "Generations Online" report in Pew (2005). In my data, 23 American bloggers show their ages in the profiles. The following table shows the generational differences in creating a blog.

Table 4.1 Generational Differences in Creating a Blog

		Online Teens (12-17)	Gen Y (18-28)	Gen X (29-40)	Trailing Boomers (41-50)	Leading Boomers (51-59)	Matures (60-69)	After Work (70+)
Pew (2005)		19%	20%	9%	3%	9%	3%	4%
23 American bloggers	Number	2	11	7	1	2	0	0
	Percentage	8.5%	48%	31%	4%	8.5%	0%	0%

The above table can be translated into the following diagram.

Diagram 4.1 Generational Differences in Creating a Blog



The diagram shows that my research result concerning generational differences among the 23 American bloggers corresponds roughly to the result from Pew (2005): blogging is mainly an online activity by young people, the proportion of blogs created by people older than 60 years is much lower than the blogs created by people under

40 years old.

"The Ageless Project", [16] a website to which bloggers regardless of their age can submit their personal and non-commercial blogs, offers real-time statistics on the number of bloggers born in different decades. The following data is collected at 11:42 Central Standard Time on February 13, 2006.

Table 4.2 Bloggers' Number Differences among Different Generational Cohorts

Birth decade	Bloggers' Number	Percentage
Born in the 1920s	10	0.43%
Born in the 1930s	26	1.12%
Born in the 1940s	90	3.87%
Born in the 1950s	232	9.97%
Born in the 1960s	433	18.60%
Born in the 1970s	848	36.43%
Born in the 1980s	666	28.61%
Born in the 1990s	18	0.77%

The above table can be translated into the following diagram:

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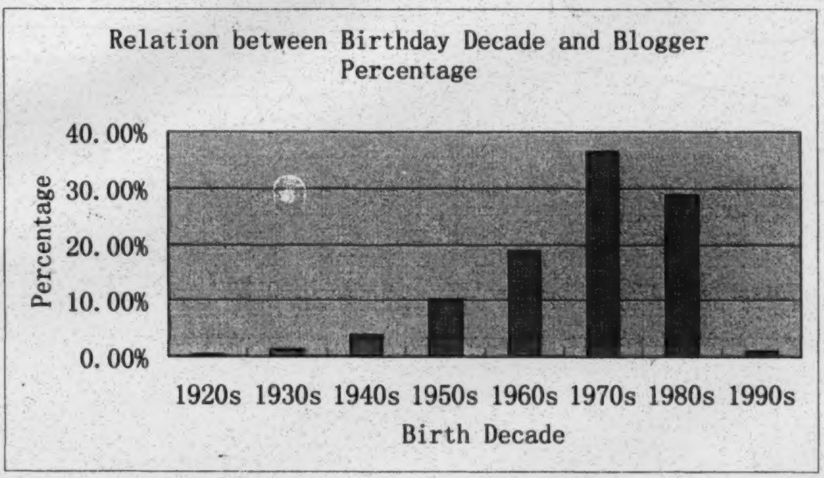
[16] http://jenett.org/ageless/

Diagram 4.2 Relations between Birthday Decade and Blogger Percentage

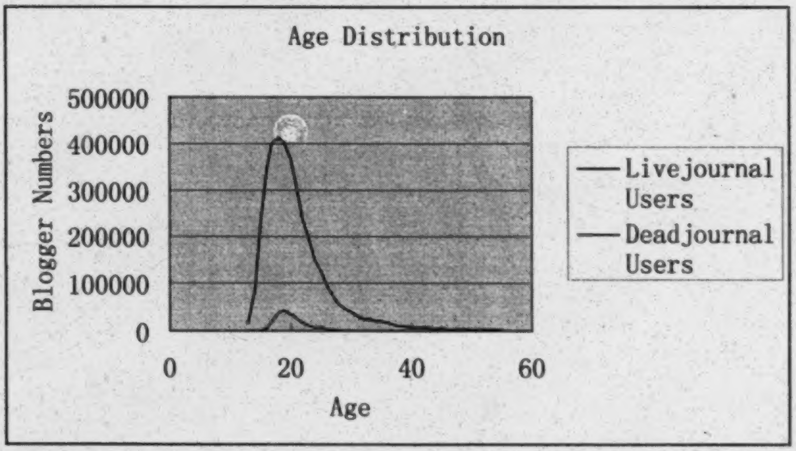


The date from "The Ageless Project" once again shows that the blogosphere mainly consists of people younger than 40, while the proportion of people older than 60 is very low.

There are many blog hosting services available online, and most of them are free. On March 30, 2006, I looked through 12 of them, and found Livejournal.com and Deadjournal.com are the only two that provide demographic data on their users. The other blog hosting services that do not offer statistical data are: Opendiary.com, Mydeardiary.com, Blury.com, Xanga.com, Blogger.com, Diaryland.com, Diarist.net, Diarist.com, Hotdiary.com, and Typepad.com.

I collected data on the age distribution from Livejournal.com and Deadjournal.com, and made a table, which can be found in **Appendix B: Age Distribution of Bloggers in Two Blog Hosting Services**. The data shows that bloggers aging from 15 to 25 are major users of Livejournal.com, and the overwhelming majority of Deadjournal.com bloggers are 17 to 23 years old. The data further substantiates the fact that young bloggers dominate the blogosphere. Diagram 4.3 is based on the data from Appendix B.

Diagram 4.3 Age Distributions of Bloggers in the Two Blog Hosting Services



4.2.3 Gender Difference

The proportion of female bloggers and male bloggers in my research data shows that among the 60 American bloggers, 14 bloggers do not identify their gender. Among the 46 bloggers whose gender is known, 17 are male and 29 are female. In other words, the proportion of female bloggers is much higher than that of male bloggers. But I have to admit that proportions of female and male bloggers in samples collected by different researchers may also be opposite to each other. For example, Pew (2005) shows that in November 2004, 22% of online girls create their own blogs, while the proportion for the online boys is just 17%. However, Pew (2005) also finds that in September 2005, men were more likely than women to create a new blog, with

11% and 8% respectively. The statistical data from Livejournal.com show that among its members, female bloggers account for 67.6% and male bloggers account for 32.4%.[17] The research conducted by Blogcensus.net in 2003 shows that among its samples, 56% are female bloggers and 28% are male bloggers.[18] Among all the users of Deadjournal.com who specified their gender, 73.2% are female bloggers and 26.8% are male bloggers.[19]

4.2.4 Geographical Distributions

Altogether 53 bloggers tell readers where they are from. The following map shows the geographical distribution of these bloggers. We can see that bloggers mainly concentrate in the coastal States.

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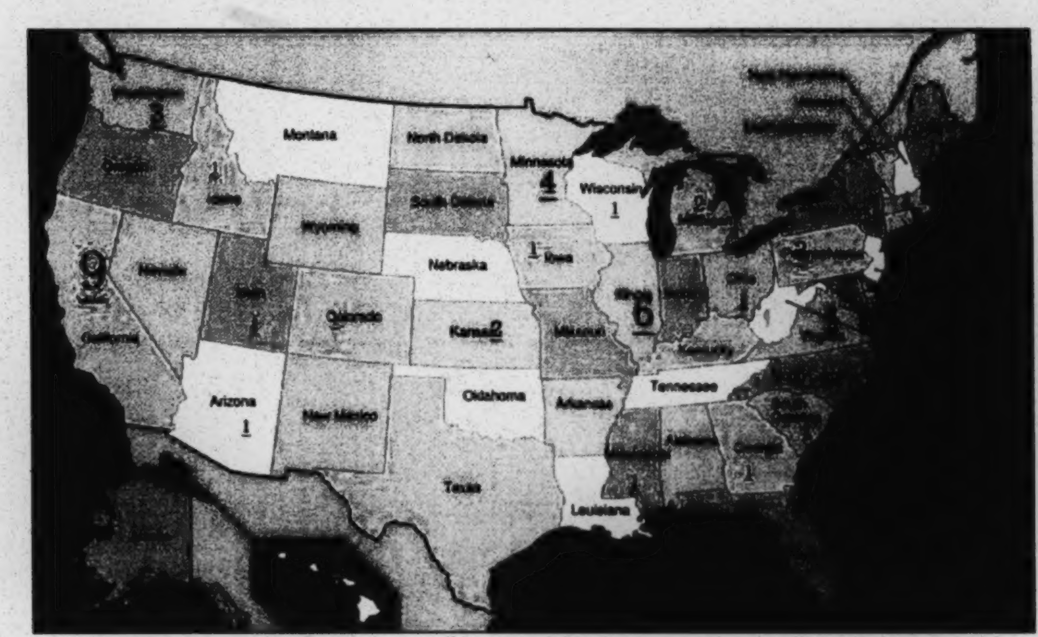
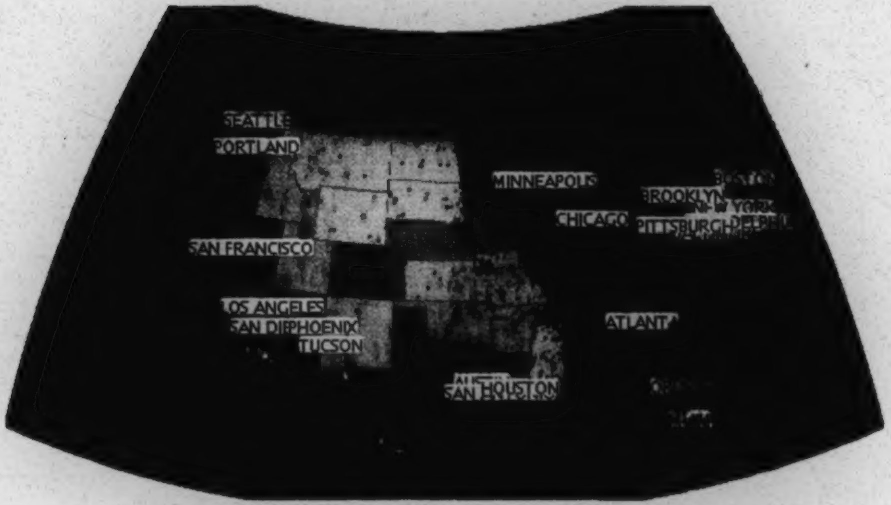
[17] http://www.livejournal.com/stats.bml Data collected on March 29, 2006.
[18] http://www.blogcensus.net/weblog/ Data collected on March 29, 2006. Some are community blogs and some bloggers' gender is unidentified.
[19] http://www.deadjournal.com/stats.bml Data collected on March 30, 2006.

Map 4.1 Geographical Distributions of the 53 American Bloggers

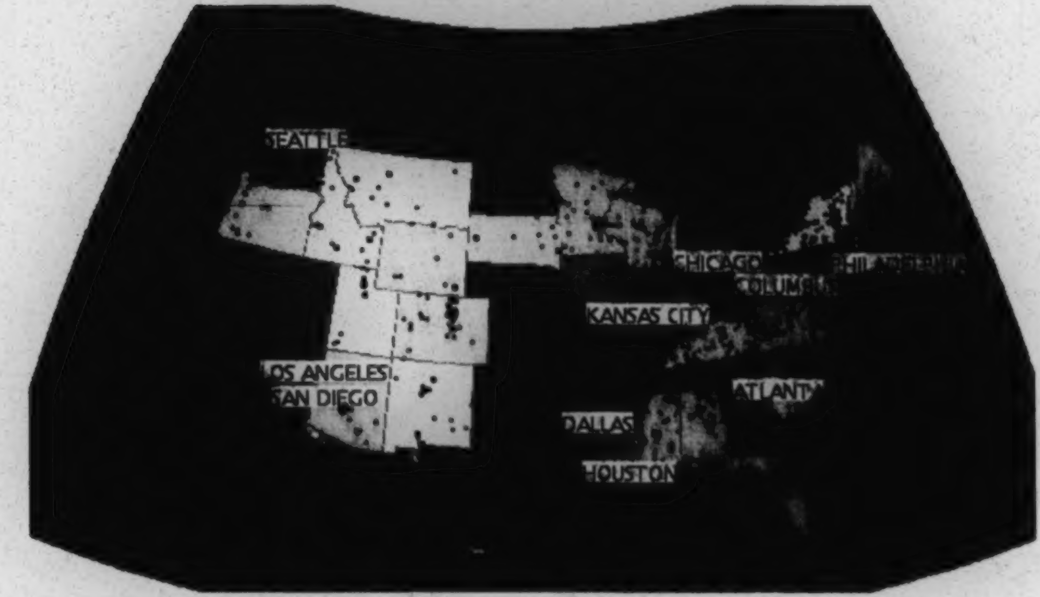

3
Montana
North Dakota
Minnesota
4
Wisconsin
1
South Dakota
Wyoming
Nebraska
1
Iowa
9
Nevada
Colorado
Kansas
2
Missouri
6
Tennessee
Arizona
1
New Mexico
Oklahoma
Arkansas
Texas
Louisiana

Hurst (2005) came up with the following two maps on geographical distribution of American bloggers by using GIS (Geographical Information System) software; the data he used are collected from Livejournal.com and Xanga.com, two very popular blog hosting services.

Map 4.2 Geographical Distributions of Livejournal Users


SEATTLE
PORTLAND
MINNEAPOLIS
BROOKLYN
CHICAGO
PITTSBURGH
SAN FRANCISCO
LOS ANGELES
PHOENIX
TUCSON
ATLANTA
HOUSTON

Map 4.3 Geographical Distributions of Xanga Users


SEATTLE
CHICAGO
COLUMBUS
KANSAS CITY
LOS ANGELES
SAN DIEGO
ATLANTA
DALLAS
HOUSTON

The following table shows the top 15 states in LiveJournal.com and Deadjournal.com.[20] The table shows that North Carolina and Arizona are not found in the top list of Deadjournal.com, and Maryland and Connecticut are not listed in Livejournal.com; the other 13 states are the same even though their ranks may differ slightly.

Table 4.3 Top 15 States in Livejournal and Deadjournal

	Livejournal (User Number)	Deadjournal(UserNumber)
1	California - 498164	California - 30606
2	Florida – 326423	New York – 26626
3	New York - 301865	Florida - 21636
4	Michigan - 260799	New Jersey - 19458
5	Texas – 225387	Michigan - 17591
6	Massachusetts - 169186	Pennsylvania - 15991
7	Pennsylvania - 166034	Texas – 13746
8	Illinois – 140218	Massachusetts - 13421
9	New Jersey - 136009	Ohio – 9365
10	Ohio – 128011	Illinois - 9252
11	Washington - 119564	Virginia – 8547
12	Virginia - 110453	Maryland - 6990
13	Georgia – 96457	Georgia - 6216
14	North Carolina - 87879	Washington - 6057
15	Arizona – 82014	Connecticut - 5524

If we compare the data from other researchers with mine, we can see that they correspond roughly with each other: the coastal States obviously have higher density of bloggers than the central inland States. What are the reasons for the uneven distribution of bloggers among different States? Could economic situation and education level of the total population in a State have something to do with the number of Internet users and then bloggers?

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[20] The data were collected on March 30, 2006 from http://www.livejournal.com/stats.bml and http://www.deadjournal.com/stats.bml

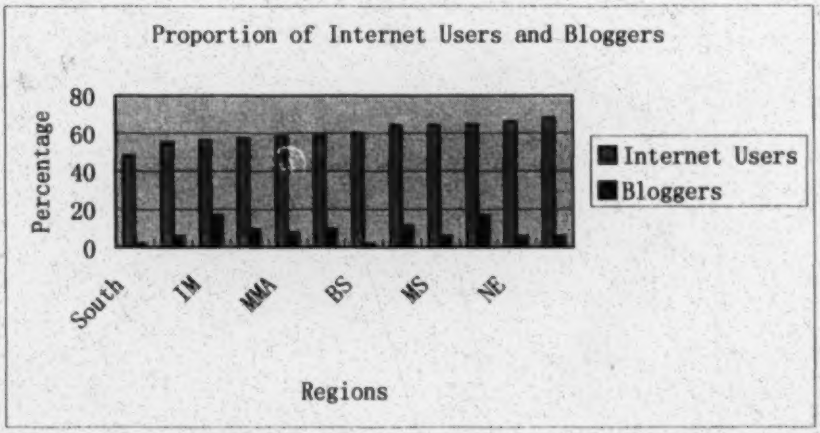
Among the 60 American bloggers, 53 identify the States they live in. I combined the geographical information on the 53 bloggers with the data from "Internet Use by Region in the United States" in the *2003 Pew Internet and American Life Project*, and made the following table:

Table 4.4 Internet Access and Bloggers Distribution in Different Locations in America

Region	Adult with Internet Access in December 2002	Division of the 53 Bloggers	
		Percentage	Number
South (AL, AR, KY, LA, MS, TN, WV)	48%	1.8%	1
Lower Midwest (IA, KS, MO, NE, OK)	55%	5.6%	3
Industrial Midwest (IL, IN, MI, OH)	56%	16.9%	9
Southeast (FL, GA, NC, SC)	57%	9.4%	5
Mid Mid-Atlantic (DE, NJ, NY, PA)	58%	7.5%	4
Upper Midwest (MN, ND, SD, WI)	59%	9.4%	5
Border States (AZ, NM, TX)	60%	1.8%	1
National Capital (MD, VA, Washington, DC)	64%	11.3%	6
Mountain States (CO, ID, MT, NV, UT, WY)	64%	5.6%	3
California (CA)	65%	16.9%	9
New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, VT, RI)	66%	5.6%	3
Pacific Northwest (OR, WA)	68%	5.6%	3

The table can be translated into the following diagram:

Diagram 4.4 Proportions of Internet Users and Bloggers in Different Regions in America



The proportion of Internet users does not strictly correspond to the proportion of bloggers. One possible reason could be that the data on adult Internet users are from Pew (2003), while my data were collected in February 2006. But the two groups of data do share some similarities: the southern States have lower Internet access and blogger numbers, while both the Internet access and blogger numbers in the Pacific and Atlantic regions are high. Special attention should be given to California, because it has the largest number of bloggers among all States. One possible reason for the different Internet access and blogger distribution may be closely related to the income level and education level of the people. Since the household income and education level in the southern States and California would not change significantly in two years, it is still reasonable for me to compare the data of Internet access in the year 2003 and the number of bloggers in 2005.

Table 4.5 Income and Education Differences among Different States

		Southern States (%)	California (%)
Household Income	Under $30,000	30	41
	$30,000 - $50,000	59	63
	$50,000 - $75,000	78	75
	Over $75,000	84	86
Education	Less than HS	14	31
	HS grad	42	47
	Some college	67	71
	College grad or more	78	82

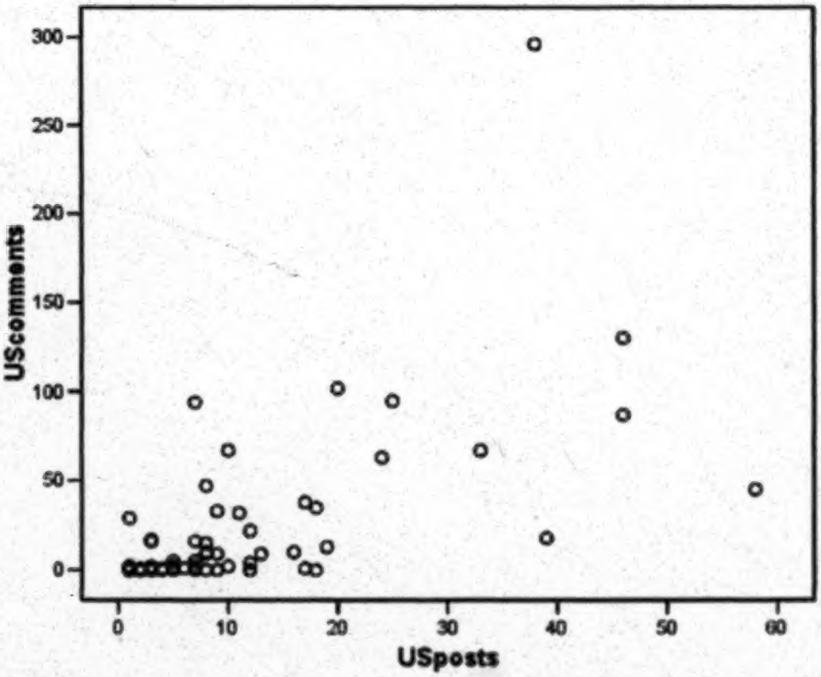
From the above table, we can see that as far as household income is concerned, the proportions of California are higher than those of the southern States, with the exception of the $50,000 to $75,000 category. The table also shows that the population in California is better educated than that in the southern States. Even though I cannot say that household income and education level are two determining factors of Internet access, it is safe to draw the conclusion that the more money one earns, the more education he receives, the more likely that he will have access to the Internet. Pew (2003) points out that "regions that have more people with substantial household incomes and college degrees tend to have both a higher proportion of Internet users in general." Lin & Halavais (2005) also suggest that "borders and coastal areas of the US contain more concentrated numbers of bloggers, while rural states, especially across the plains, are home to relatively low densities of bloggers." They also conclude that "the overall distribution of weblogs is consistent with both population distribution and concentrations of high socioeconomic status."

4.2.5 Relations between Posts and Comments

What is the relationship between the blogger's posts and readers' comments? Will more posts definitely bring more comments from readers? When reading blogs, probably most readers are more concerned with the "quality" than "quantity" of posts, so if one just rambles meaningless things in his blogs (even though blog entries are very personal things and one can talk about anything and in any writing style one prefers), he will probably not attract a lot of readers, let alone many comments. After all, no reader wants to read and comment on fluffy things that are not worth their valuable time. But on the other hand, if one does not update his blog frequently, even if his posts are well written, he will not be likely to have many loyal readers. After all, one will probably not visit a blog again if the latest post was written a long time ago.

I made some diagrams by using the Scatter Plot function in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In statistical study, a scatter plot is often employed to identify potential associations between two variables. One may be considered to be an explanatory variable (such as posts) and another may be considered a response variable (such as comments). Usually there are three kinds of possible relations between two variables: positive association indicated by an upward trend line (also called " line of best fit "—a line on a scatter plot which can be drawn near the points to more clearly show the trend between two sets of data); negative association indicated by a downward trend line; and no notable association, in which case a scatterplot would not indicate any trends whatsoever.

Diagram 4.5 Relations between Posts and Comments of American Bloggers



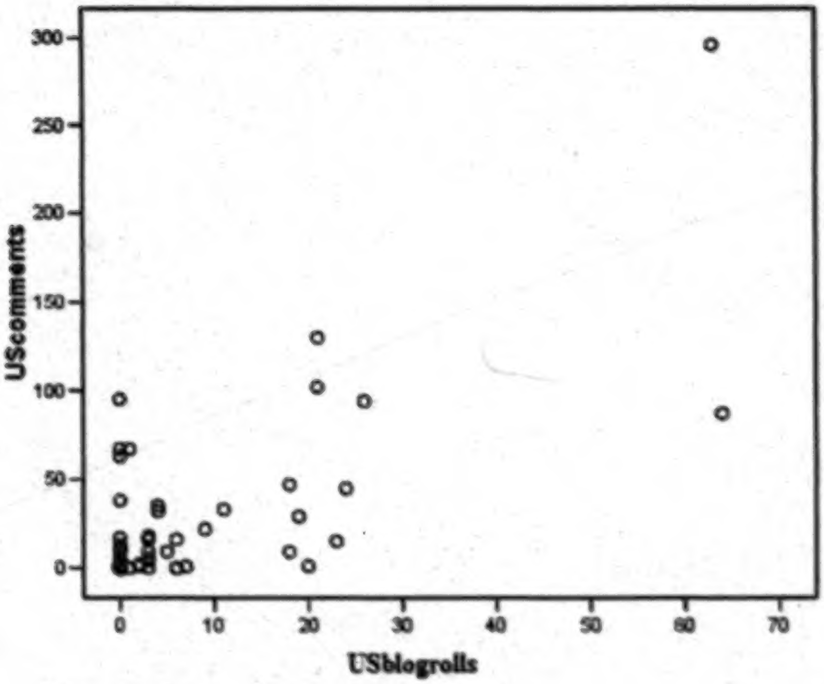
A quick inspection of the scatterplot gives some indication of the degree of relationship between the two variables: posts and comments. However, if we want to quantify the relationship, we need to know the coefficient of correlation.

In this case, the Pearson Coefficient (*r*) is 0.608, which means there is a relatively moderate and positive relationship between the posts and comments. (There are 58 valid bloggers because the number of comments for two bloggers is not available). However, inspection of the points in the scatter plot indicates notable variance from the line of best fit. So it would be safe for me to conclude tentatively that the more frequently one blogs, the more likely (not necessarily) that one would receive comments. The conclusion could be supported by the following data: the average number of posts for the 58 American bloggers is 12, while that of comments is 25. Blogger No. 18, No. 14 and No. 45 received 296, 130 and 102 comments respectively, and their corresponding posts numbers are 38, 46 and 20. But again the number of posts is not the only factor determining the number of comments, for example: the blogger who has the most posts (58) just received 45 comments, which means that other factors may also play roles in determining the number of comments. The quality of posts may influence the popularity of a blog. Hence in future research, it is worthwhile to study the writing and topics of the most popular bloggers, from whom one may get some hints on how to increase traffic to a blog.

4.2.6 Relations between Blogrolls and Comments

Next, we consider the relation between reader's comments and blogrolls. Will one receive many comments if he has many links to other bloggers? I assume that the more other bloggers one links to, the more comments he should receive. But will the data support this assumption? We look to the following diagram.

Diagram 4.6 Relations between Blogrolls and Comments of American Bloggers



The Pearson's Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation between blogroll and comments of the 58 American bloggers is 0.720, which means there is a strong and positive relationship between them. In other words, higher links to other bloggers would be likely to attract more comments from them. But we should bear in mind that comments to one's posts do not necessarily come from blogroll members; they may come from unknown readers. Of course, there are exceptions to the conclusion: blogger No. 4 has no links to other bloggers, yet he received 95 comments. Blogger

No. 18 has 20 links to other bloggers, however, he just got only one comment. As we mentioned above, the quality of post could be one of several possible factors determining the number of comments. Future research is indicated.

4.3 Demographic Study of the 60 Chinese Bloggers

Detailed demographic data on the 60 Chinese bloggers can be found in **Appendix C: Demographic Data of the 60 Chinese Bloggers**.

4.3.1 Privacy Issue

Among the 60 Chinese bloggers, 13 publicize their email addresses, much lower than their American counterparts (28 bloggers). And no Chinese blogger publicizes his/her telephone or mobile phone numbers. But many bloggers do post pictures in their blogs, even though I had no way to guarantee that the photos posted are bloggers themselves. There are far fewer photos available in the 60 American bloggers, however, it does not necessarily mean that American bloggers are more concerned about their privacy than Chinese bloggers. Blogger.com, not like MSN, does not offer an individual album space for its users.

4.3.2 Generational Differences

Altogether 15 Chinese bloggers publicize their age, which is just 25% of the total, a little lower than the American counterparts (38%). All of the 15 bloggers are younger than 30, which indicate that young people make up a large proportion of the Chinese blogosphere. SOHU (2005) finds that 92.62% of the bloggers in its sample are under 30 years old and 49.66% of the bloggers are students.

The age distribution in the blogosphere is also consistent with the age distribution of the Internet users in China. The following data are from the China Internet Report (2006), from which we can see that Internet users under the age of 30 account for 71% of the total Internet population in China.

Table 4.6 Age Distributions of Chinese Internet Users

Age	<18	18-24	25-30	31-35	36-40	41-50	51-60	>60
Proportion	16.6%	35.1%	19.3%	11.6%	7.1%	6.8%	2.7%	0.8%

4.3.3 Gender Difference

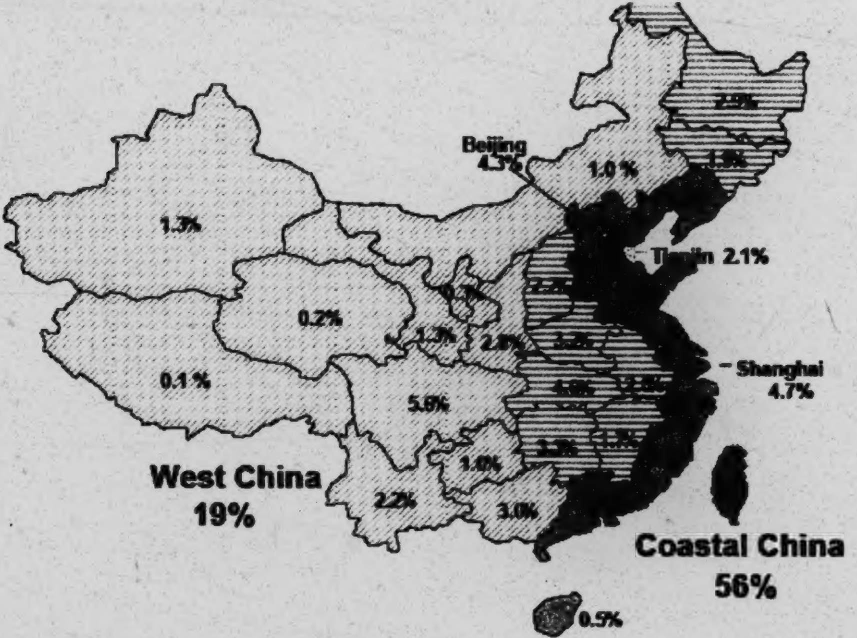
There are 39 bloggers who identified their gender, among which 25 bloggers (64%) are female and 14 bloggers (36%) are male. But I would not say for sure that there are more female bloggers than male bloggers in the Chinese blogosphere. Because SOHU (2005) finds that in its sample, male bloggers account for 57.3% and female bloggers account for 42.7%. But SOHU (2005) also warns the readers that since the investigation is not based on a probability sample, though the sample is very big, the investigation results could not be applied to the whole blogosphere.

4.3.4 Geographical Distributions

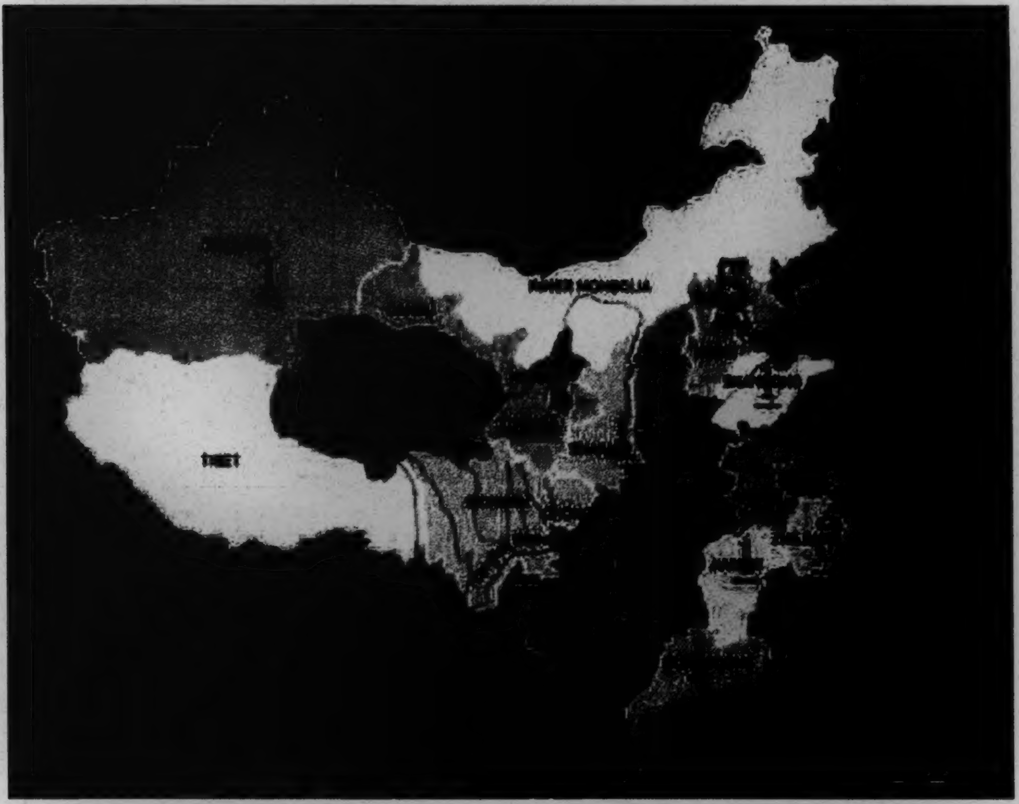
As to the locations of these 60 bloggers, since there are only 19 bloggers who tell which city they come from, it is not easy to know the overall geographical distribution of Chinese bloggers. But all of the bloggers who did publicize their location are from big cities in China. The geographical distribution of Chinese bloggers is like that in America: bloggers concentrate in big cities in coastal provinces where the education level and household income are higher than the average national level. Beijing and Shanghai are two good examples. According to China Internet Report (2006), Beijing and Shanghai rank top two in regard to the proportion of Internet users to city population, with 28.7% and 26.6% respectively. The report also shows that 14.2% of the Internet users in China created blogs. Morgan Stanley (2005) also finds that in China "Internet users concentrated in coastal regions and major metropolitan areas." SOHU (2005) finds that Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou rank as the top three cities where the proportion of bloggers are highest in China, which are 17.95%, 13.81% and 9.13% respectively.

The following two diagrams can support the argument that the number of bloggers is generally in proportion to the number of Internet users in China.

Map 4.4 The Percentage of Internet Users among Different Provinces in China



Map 4.5 Geographical Distributions of the 19 Chinese Bloggers

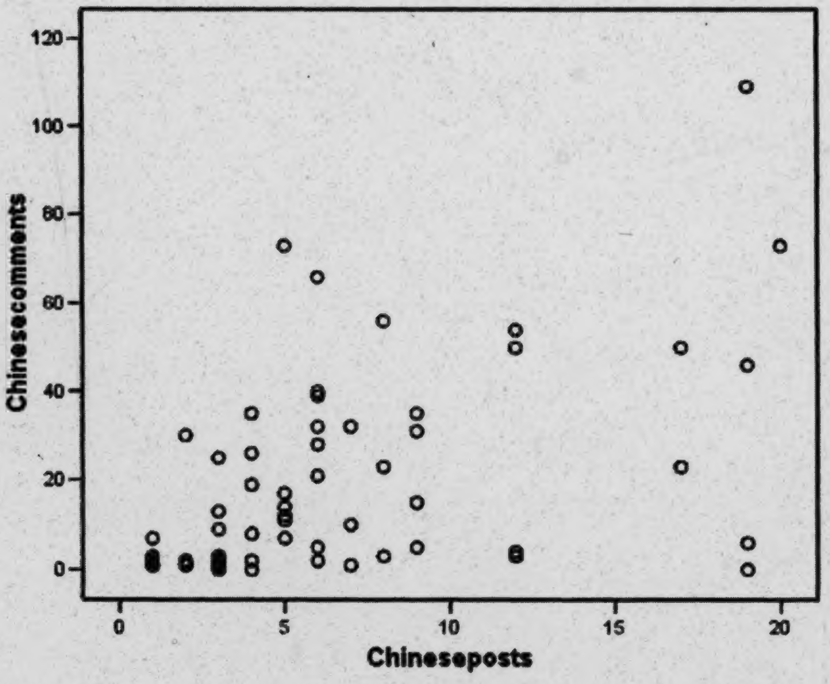


The two diagrams correspond with each other: Internet users and bloggers concentrate in the coastal provinces and metropolitan cities where the educational level and household income is higher than the average national level.

4.3.5 Relations between Posts and Comments

The relation between posts and comments of the 60 Chinese bloggers can be seen in the following diagram.

Diagram 4.7 Relations between Posts and Comments of Chinese Bloggers

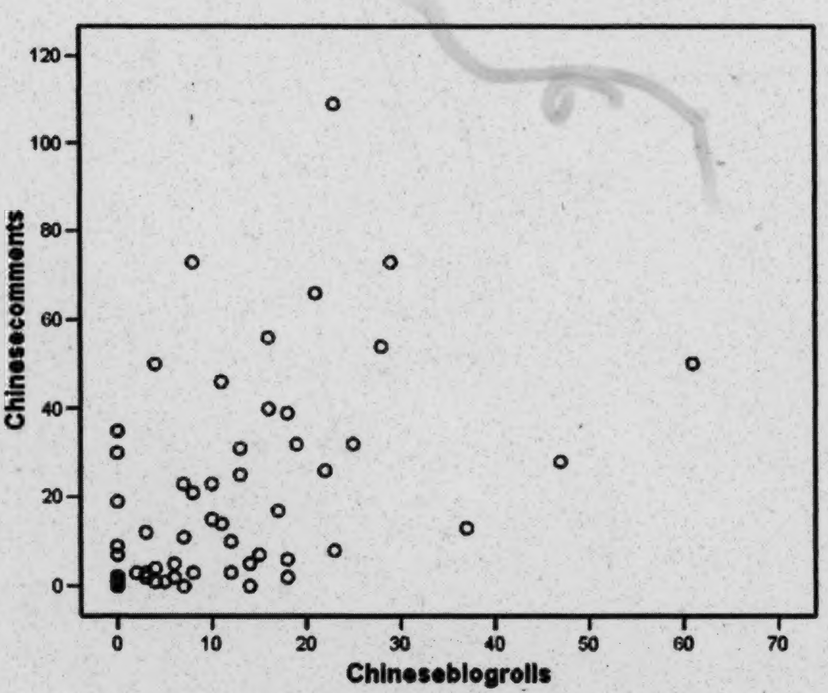


In this case, *r* =0.495, which means there is a weak positive relationship between the posts and comments of the 60 Chinese bloggers. This is a weaker result than it is for American, but similarly suggests that frequent posting is one factor in receiving comments.

4.3.6 Relations between Blogrolls and Comments

How about the relation between the blogroll and comments? Will one receive more comments if he has more links to other bloggers?

Diagram 4.8 Relations between Blogrolls and Comments of Chinese Bloggers



The Pearsonian *r* is 0.459, which means there is a weak positive relationship between blogrolls and comments of the 60 Chinese bloggers. Tentatively I would say that for the Chinese bloggers, if they want to attract more comments, they should post frequently, and also try to link more to other bloggers. They could also improve their writing skills and try to talk about things which are popular and attractive to readers.

Interesting to say is that the scores of Pearsonian *r* for American bloggers are larger than those of Chinese bloggers. It is worthwhile to probe the possible reasons for such phenomenon in further study.

The following table shows the total and average numbers of posts, comments, and links to other bloggers by the 60 Chinese bloggers and 58 American bloggers.

Table 4.7 Total and Average Numbers on Posts, Comments and Blogrolls

		Posts	Comments	Blogrolls
Chinese	Total 60 bloggers	402	1,191	658
	Average	6.7	19.8	10.9
American	Total 58 bloggers	678	1,456	399
	Average	11.7	25	6.9

The table shows that Americans post more frequently than their Chinese counterparts (11.7 VS. 6.7), and they received more comments than Chinese bloggers (25 VS. 19.8), yet they have fewer links to other bloggers than the Chinese bloggers (6.9 vs. 10.9). It seems that American readers are more likely to comment than Chinese readers, further research should be conducted to explain the phenomenon.

4.4 Qualitative Content Analysis of the 60 American Bloggers

Due to time and energy limitation, it is quite impossible for me to give all 729 posts equal attention. As a result, I just gave priority to the important and repeated topics and the following content analysis is by no means exhaustive.

4.4.1 Links and Quotations

In its early days, the blog mainly consists of links to other web sites that the blogger thinks are valuable for other readers to visit; bloggers may also add brief comments to the links they recommend. Nowadays, even though the majority of posts are written by bloggers themselves, bloggers still sometimes embed links in their posts to give readers further information (readers should be aware that some links may be dead links). The content of links is versatile--they can be links to political news, to an online computer game, to a new-released blockbuster publicity website, or to a website testing your personality. As to the quotation, it is usually separated from one's own writing. The quotation could be part of one's favourite book, for example, one body-builder quoted an excerpt of *ARNOLD: The Education of a Bodybuilder*; it can be one's favorite movie lines; it can also be famous sayings, funny stories, to-do or not-to-do lists like "Newly discovered things I can do now that I'm single". In a word, since bloggers have different hobbies, the contents of quotations are also different, and people may quote anything they like.

4.4.2 The Blog as a Communication Channel

Blogging is in fact a two-way communication in which the bloggers offer links, quotations or write down their own thoughts. At the same time, many bloggers would like to receive comments from readers. Thus an online virtual community is built, in which "relationship development and social control are primarily external, directed outward, functions that use self-disclosure to build connections with others or to manipulate their opinions" (Miller & Shepherd 2004). One blogger says in his blogs: "Thanks for visiting my website! Your comments are very appreciated!" Another blogger writes: "I want to say thanks to The Pink Pamphlet for posting on my blog.

I'm honored." Thus the comment function bridges the spatial gap between the blogger and the reader, and makes the communication between them fast and convenient. Many bloggers value the communication with readers very much, which can be seen from their greetings to readers. Altogether 19 bloggers (31%) say "Happy New Year", "Happy Holidays" or "Merry Christmas" to the readers. One blogger gives detailed instruction on how to install Sirius (satellite radio) into a Chevrolet Silverado; he also offers his email address to readers in case they have further questions. The writing style of bloggers is usually very informal and intimate, as though the blogger is talking with his friends. For example, when talking about sending Christmas cards to his friends, one blogger writes: "I usually have my cards out much earlier, but I had to wait for the picture and all, so it's a bit delayed. You might get one, if we're friends."

Blogs may even play the role of notice board, for example, one blogger who is an opera, music and arts lover notifies his readers of the upcoming local concerts and operas. He writes:

> Monday, February 13, and Tuesday, February 14, at 7:30pm - The Peabody Chamber Opera and Baltimore Baroque Band will perform three short pieces of the 17th Century genre of "pastorale and masque," …It's free and in the Peabody's Friedberg Hall.

Another student blogger posts the following notice: "Just telling everyone that school resumes on January 3rd…not January 2nd." One blogger even used his personal blog as a free advertisement platform: "Who wants Band Camp on

DVD...you can make an offer with me if you want it."

4.4.3 A Blog Game

There are 5 American bloggers who mentioned a blog game, which is a fun get-to-know-you blog activity. The procedure goes like this: if you are tagged by another blogger with questions, you have to answer them and then add further question(s), and you need to list the names of several bloggers whom you in turn infect, also you should leave a post for them, letting them know they should follow suit. In this way, the number of bloggers involved in this game increases gradually. The content of questions are different, for example: what is your nervous habit? What is your favourite color/animal/food/month etc.? What are the three physical things you like about yourself? What are the three things you want to do really badly now (with a special person)? In some games, no question is asked, but one is asked to talk about some random facts about oneself. To put it simply, through answering questions or listing facts about oneself, bloggers have more chance to know each other.

4.4.4 Blog on Blog

A very interesting aspect of content analysis is blogger's opinions about blogs. There are 17 bloggers (28%) who talk about blogging practice in their posts. Some bloggers are eager to receive feedback from the audience. For example, one writes: "I posted last night and was wondering what response I would get on my comments.... I guess everyone is busy with the holiday. I got a few comments and appreciate them whole heartedly." Some bloggers are addicted to blogging and even blog during work *break, as can be seen in the following* posts: "A brief ramble, very brief I am on my break at work. But I am going to try to write a lot more, take my breaks at work to write and that sort of thing, its satisfying for some odd reason..." Some bloggers say sorry to readers for being slow in updating the blog and give reasons for that, for instance: "I've been absent from posting for longer than usual, but I'm okay, in case you were at all curious. I was out of town this weekend and haven't had much time to catch up here. Just wanted to check in really quick - more later on." Another blogger posts: "Sorry I haven't posted for a while...I've been busy with homework. Well anyway I really don't have anything else to say. I'll post again if I think of anything." Other bloggers are slow in updating because they may think life is boring and they have nothing interesting to entertain readers; this poor guy says that his blog is "so boring even I wouldn't read it." Another says: "I haven't posted for 5 days and I have nothing interesting to say about those 5 days." One blogger talks about the psychological concern of people who are reluctant to begin blogging: "It's surprising how many people I've mentioned this to have that same sort of anxiety about what to post if you had your own blog. I'm certainly not used to it, what am I supposed to say?" Keeping on blogging is not as easy as one may think when he creates the first blog, and it deserves continuous investment of time, energy and enthusiasm.

Some bloggers would like to introduce blogging to friends and persuade them to blog too, hoping that they would have more blogs to read and will probably receive comments from them. One blogger is very happy because "Claudia has finally decided to join the blogsphere after nearly a year of lurking. Congrats Claud. She'll be added to my blogroll shortly and I expect interesting things from her." When bloggers find a blogger that deserves attention, they will probably recommend it to close friends, or even to unknown readers. Look at what this blogger says: "Every time I read Scott Adams' blog, I want to recommend it to someone. Usually, it's to whoever is closest to me at the time. Hey, listen to this… Today, I'm going to recommend it to everyone." Another blogger talks about his blogroll:

> Most notable are the blog links. If your blog is not on there, it's because I have to leave for work in a couple of minutes, and I just put up the blogs with addresses that I have memorized. The reason I have them memorized is because I don't get to them via links on some other page. I plan to expand the blog list later.

If one receives an ever-increasing number of comments from readers, one will probably be happy, because that means others are interested in his ideas. One blogger could not help expressing his happiness: "It's been a great year for this blog. Started in May and readership has only gone up. Thanks for reading and commenting and linking to me everyone!" This blogger is extremely excited because "The Farmboyz have made me aware that I've been nominated for 'Best New Gay Blog', by some blog site or other. I've never really won anything before."

Attracting more and more hits is certainly the dream of many bloggers, but one should not tell lies in order to attract high traffic. One blogger discloses the hypocrisy of a girl who wants to be a hero, because in her blogs she "stretches reality, expanding insignificant events and ignoring hurtful ones." The girl wanted to "create a smug persona that her audience eagerly embraces and idolizes." The blogger then says that he would not maintain a false identity in order to win the audience. Talking about the essence of blogs, he says:

> But I can't. It's not that I don't have the imagination; that's just not me. And that's not the reason I blog. I don't want to make connections based on lies. One of the reasons I like blogging is that it comes the opportunity to meet people from all over the world who have the same sense of humour, passions, convictions and/or insecurities as you. People who say: That was a funny story, or something like that happened to me, too.

4.4.5 The Blog as a Publishing Channel

Those who like writing in their spare time may cherish the hope that someday the writings could be published. But after all, not so many amateur writers would be lucky enough to fulfill the dream. Blogs offer such people an easy and free channel to share the fruit of their mental labours with readers. If ones' writings are very creative, he will probably have a better chance to attract more readers. And if one is popular enough in the vast blogosphere, some publisher may finally invite him to sign a book contract. For example, Riverbend, the *nom de plume* of a female young blogger in Iraq, named her blogs "Baghdad Burning". Readers can learn first-hand information on war in her blogs, other topics such as Arab family ties, women and Islam, the hijab, Ramadan customs, relations between Muslims and Christians, etc. are also touched. The most important reason for the popularity of her blog is that posts are written from the perspective of an ordinary Iraqi girl, and the descriptions are vivid, genuine and unpretentious. Her blog attracted thousands of hits everyday from readers around the world. In 2005, the girl had her blog published, entitled *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq*. The book was warmly received. *Publishers Weekly*, a weekly trade news magazine targeted at publishers, librarians, booksellers and literary agents, sang high praise of the girl's writings, saying that: "the blog… offers quick takes on events from a perspective too often overlooked, ignored, or suppressed" (Riverbend 2005). However, the proportion of works written by fiction lovers is not high in the blogosphere; there are only 3 bloggers who post their poems or short stories. A reader encouraged one such blogger by saying: "Great story! Keep writing." Another reader comments: "I love this poem...thank you!"

In addition to the above-mentioned contents, there are other popular topics. Although it is not easy to categorize the contents of all the posts, I still find that some topics are mentioned frequently in the blogosphere.

4.4.6 The Blog as an Online Diary

Many bloggers talk about daily life in their blogs, which is natural because the blog in essence is an online personal journal. About 83% of the respondents in Viégas' sample characterize their blogs as "personal musing" (Viégas 2005). Self-expression in one's blog can "serve the intrinsic self-disclosure functions of both self clarification and self validation, enhance self awareness and confirming already-held beliefs" (Miller & Shepherd 2004). The following categorization is by no means exhaustive and some contents are overlapping: a post can belong to more than one category. I tentatively classify the most popular topics into the following several categories:

4.4.6.1 Holiday Activities

Christmas and New Year are certainly the most important festivals of the year in North America. It is the time for family members and friends to gather together to celebrate and relax. Hence it is a popular topic in blogs. Since my sample was drawn from December posts, there are 21 bloggers who talk about their activities during the happy holidays, such as visiting family members, Christmas shopping, Christmas party, etc. One blogger gives readers a detailed description about his Christmas activities: "…12 hour drive to Michigan, 4 days spent with my parents, 4 bottles of wine drank, 3 white Russians drank, many hours shopping with my mom, and 4 shirts bought for me, etc…"

4.4.6.2 Films/Music/Books/Computer games/Sports

Entertainment and bodybuilding seem to be indispensable parts of life for some bloggers. There are 16 bloggers who amuse themselves by going to cinema, listening to music, reading favourite books, playing computer games, watching sports, or playing basketball. Many bloggers comment on the films or music just released, saying whether they like it or not, and why. Blockbusters produced by Hollywood such as *Kingkong* and *Syriana* are commented frequently by bloggers. One may relate the film he saw to the whole society, for example, one blogger writes: "*Syriana* proposes bold changes for US foreign policy: We must stop seeing only the short-term gains. Our long-term survival depends on it."

4.4.6.3 Family life/School life/Work

Family is important to everyone, so it is a popular blog topic. A blogger talks mainly about the long waiting process of adopting a Chinese child:

> We are very excited to be Emma's family. She is already loved even though she's still in China and we don't know her yet…we were hoping to have our referral by January but things have slowed down in China. Now it will be sometime in the spring of 2006 before we see a picture of Emma.

Another blogger posted many pictures of her adopted Chinese child, with detailed description about the child's daily life. And these two bloggers also link to other bloggers who have adopted or are interested in adopting a child from the Third World. As we mentioned before, many of the bloggers are school students, so in the collected data, 7 bloggers talk about their school life. The common topics are certainly what concern students most: grades, homework, and oral defense for a degree. Interesting stories happened during work are also talked about by bloggers. One blogger expresses his satisfaction with his present job, saying: "This company has treated me better in the past five months than Harris ever did in the previous three years. As a result, I will work harder and more diligently for this company than I ever have before."

4.4.6.4 Feelings

Many bloggers post when they are in a good mood; they would like to share their happiness with readers. One blogger says: "Normally I am extremely lackadaisical about posting, but I have a finished object, I have a finished object! Sweater." Another blogger says that he is "completely consumed with the excitement of PRESENTS!" However, 7 bloggers would like to take blogs as their intimate friends to which they can express their unhappiness, in which case, the blog plays a catharsis function. The reasons for low spirit may vary, such as loneliness ("I think I'm on the downward part of the spiral. I'm so depressed tonight. Xmas night alone."), anger (the blogger could not go back to Canada because he could not get his passport renewed, he writes: "So now the hotel's cancelled. The flight's cancelled. Mom is heart broken. And I won't be getting any gifts. Thanks Passport Canada. You suck."), complaint ("It takes me around 20 minutes to get to work if I leave by 7 AM but it can take up to 45 minutes on the way back home if I leave 5 - 6 PM (!!) Easy public transportation please."). Some students may feel depressed because of heavy schoolwork; one student writes: "I'm just a little stressed out because schoolwork is coming to a head with finals starting." One blogger feels bad because he is somewhat neglected by a girl: "you have no idea how bad this sucks, one girl barely even acts like I exist." Another young student expresses his mental struggle as to whether he should communicate his love to a girl:

> The reason, I think, that I was sad is because I wanted to get to know this girl named Emily. It's our last day in class. We did talked for a bit, and I was mad at myself for not stirring up things to talk about. But now that that's over, I'm looking ahead on Friday. I am also worried that on Friday, I would just keep silent again. Friday's Do-or-Die day, I suppose. Man, I am so

confused and sad.

To sum it up, some bloggers like to reveal their innermost thoughts to their blogs when they are in a bad mood, which may hopefully help them get relief. Comments and encouragement from considerate readers may help to increase a blogger's confidence in overcoming difficulties.

4.4.6.5 Health

Personal health is also a hot topic in the blogosphere. Medicine could help to reduce physical pain, but one could not neglect the effect of psychological treatment. It seems that people who feel under the weather would like to talk about their illness in blogs, and they may sometimes get psychological comfort from readers. There are 13 American bloggers (21%) who talk about health problems in their blogs, such as catching cold, and insomnia. Sometimes they give detailed description about their symptoms: one blogger complains about "having head problems, concussions…have the symptoms, right down to the memory problems-on and off. It has freaked me out..."; another says that he did not feel well because he had "high temperature, dizziness, soreness, the whole bit"; one blogger feels tortured because he could not sleep well in the evening and had "weird dreams and hallucinations"; another talks a lot about his surgery; one female blogger tells readers that she has contracted breast cancer, and she asks readers: "Who do you know has had breast cancer and beaten it? I need to talk to those people." One blogger complained that "My arthritis is really really bad."

4.4.6.6 Reflection on Life

Things that have happened in daily life always give bloggers much food for thought. Two bloggers recorded their philosophical meditations in blogs, which are very instructive and thought-provoking. For example, talking about what gift he wants to get for Christmas, one blogger says: "All I want for Christmas is a clear mind and courage. Clear mind to help me move on, and courage to go after chances without doubt." The other blogger gives witty remarks on forgiveness:

> I could go for hours blaming people for what I am today, for mistakes I have made, because its so easy to blame for our mistakes, our wrong, our stupidity, but what would I gain from it all by hurting another over and over again? I gain nothing only self pity. When will we take all our mistakes and change it, instead of hurting and being cruel why don't we take it into our own hands and try to make it better, forgive…

Also at the end of the year, it is common for people to summarize the past year and plan for the coming year. One bloggers writes: "I had high personal expectations for 2005 and the year and all that happened surpassed anything I could have hoped for, but that I can proclaim with total confidence 2006 *will* be even better."

4.4.6.7 Political News

Four American bloggers talk about political news in their blogs and they seem to be dissatisfied with the government. One person comments on the MTA strikes in New York: "I really feel bad for all of the people in NYC that have virtually been stranded by the transit strike." Another talks about the riots in Paris: "I am extremely upset by these attitudes of the Australian officials and the French officials. I am entirely disenfranchised by the leaders of my own country (the United States) and am almost completely apathetic to the politics of this country since I don't trust their initial steps from decades ago which they refuse to acknowledge." Another blogger believes that "The government doesn't care about poor people." Other topics such as Bush's spying on regular Americans and the Iraq war are also discussed.

4.4.6.8 Religion

America is a Christian country, but ordinary bloggers seem not to be interested in talking about religion. Only three bloggers in my sample talk about Christianity in their blogs. All the posts of one blogger are on Christianity, because he is a Professor and Pastor; he is very unhappy about the secularization of Christmas. The other two bloggers discuss which phrases ("happy holidays" or "merry Christmas") are more suitable when greeting others, especially for public figures such as retailers. One of them gives preference to "Happy Holidays": the reason he provides is that "many religions celebrate holidays during the Christmas season, we should be tolerant of ALL religions, and our country was founded by Christians but for the purposed religious freedom."

4.4.6.9 Confession

Confession, no matter from a religious or secular perspective, is a practice conducted by people to remove psychological burdens resulting from the "wrong" things that one has done. The above-mentioned Professor and Pastor blogger is an example, confessing that Christians should share the responsibility for the secularization of Christmas, he says: "while we can blame the rabid secularists and the liberal behind every bush, we may as well admit it--it is the fault of evangelicalism -- it is our fault." Three other bloggers admit fault from a secular point of view: one confesses that "I've been driving drunk way too much lately," another admits that "My hair is greasy because I woke up late. I don't even care," the third blogger blames himself by saying "I was dating this girl for a very long time but we broke up so we could see other people…my fault, could I have been any more stupid?" By admitting their mistakes, they hope to get pardoned from others or simply to get some psychological relief.

4.4.6.10 Technology

Four bloggers talk about some latest technology development in IT field. It might be a piece of news, such as "TIVO has applied for a patent to use RFID along with TIVO. This will allow TIVO to know who is watching and change the settings to fit that user," or it can be some specialized knowledge, such as "using CSS constants with PHP."

4.4.6.11 Pets and Handicrafts

Three bloggers show strong affection for their pets and they consider the pet as a member of the family: a lot of pictures of lovely kitties can be found in their posts. Two bloggers talk about their knitting process and experiences, and they show pictures of their finished products proudly to readers. Another blogger tells readers the detailed process of making new bracelets with beads, and the blogger does not hesitate to share pictures of her homemade handicrafts with readers.

4.4.6.12 Sex

Even though Americans enjoy freedom of speech, not all the topics are suitable for blogs, such as sex, though there are 7 bloggers in my sample who used dirty words occasionally to express their anger or dissatisfaction.

In Chapter 3, I mentioned the American female blogger Jessica Cutler who became notorious because of her sex blogs. However, for the ordinary bloggers, sex is not a popular topic. But exceptions still exist, and 2 of the total 21 posts by one female blogger in my sample are on her detailed sex experience. Knowing that the topic is not very elegant, the blogger warns: "uh, it's a bit explicit for this side, so I've got it on the "poetry side". PROCEED ONLY IF YOU'RE NOT EASILY OFFENDED." Here "poetry side" is the link to her sexual stories. The reason I want to mention this special case is that the female blogger is one of the two bloggers among the 60 who do not publicize readers' comments (readers can send comments to her email address); probably she do not want us to see the possibly unfavourable comments from readers.

4.4.6.13 Travel

Some persons keep blogs during their travel to keep friends or family updated on their adventures. In my data, one blogger talks about his travel to England. He posted many beautiful pictures of famous architecture in London, such as Prince Charles'

House, Big Ben, and Buckingham Palace.

4.5 Qualitative Content Analysis of the 60 Chinese Bloggers

Since many functions of blogs are the same for both Americans and Chinese bloggers, the analysis for the Chinese bloggers will be a little terser than that on the American blogs.

4.5.1 Links and Quotations

The 60 Chinese bloggers do not link as frequently as their American counterparts. But on the other hand, they are much more interested in quoting favorite articles. There are 24 Chinese bloggers (40%) who quote something in their posts. Quotations cover a wide range, such as: favorite songs (English song: *Easier*--JOEY MCINTYRE); movie lines (lines from *Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles*, *The Lord of the Rings*); poems (*On a faded violet*--Percy Bysshe Shelley); book excerpts (*Tao Te Ching*, literal translation: *The Book of the Way and its Virtue*); sayings (the saying of Shakyamuni: "Different levels have different Laws, and the Law at each level isn't the absolute Truth of the universe, but the Law at any given level does act as a guide at that level"); famous philosophical law (Murphy's law); famous speech (Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address); top-list ("Brief introduction to best 30 youth film in world", "20 English novels which are blogged most"); to-do or not-to-do list ("To die 14 ways in Shanghai", "100 pieces of advice on how to be a wise woman").Young Chinese bloggers are interested in quoting articles talking about romance or love stories; popular topics include "Rank list of best boyfriend among the 12 constellations"; "On the description of person with Pisces constellation"; "How to find an ideal boyfriend/girlfriend?" It should be pointed out that some articles on romance are quoted by more than one blogger. The blog in this way plays the role of information exchange platform; whenever one finds things that he thinks are worth reading, he would like to share them with others.

4.5.2 The Blog as a Communication Channel

Most Bloggers welcome comments from readers. Altogether 13 bloggers (21%) say either "Happy New Year" or "Merry Christmas" to readers. Interesting to say is that Christmas, a western festival, is now very popular with young people in big cities in China. When bloggers find favorite upcoming events, they would like to share them with others. Blogs thus can play the role of notice board. For example, one blogger put up two notices in his blogs, one is on a Swiss design exhibition, and the other is on a jazz performance in a bar. Detailed time, place, and price are available in the two notices, in addition to some background knowledge. Another blogger put up a Dutch- treat dining out notice to her friends; time, place, and price included, as well as other activities that they would do after the dinner. Of course notice in a blog is just a supplement to ordinary communication such as telephone or email. The reason is simple: one cannot guarantee that his notice will be read by the intended readers. From the perspective of the blogger who organized the get-together, he may think it is an important event and hence is worth recording.

4.5.3 A Blog Game

Three bloggers mention the blog game. Even though the content of the Chinese blog game may be different from the American one, the procedure is the same: the blogger tagged by others has to answer some questions, then he should tag several new bloggers. Such questions are common in the game: what is your favourite book/colour/food? What will you do if you cannot sleep in the evening? Some questions are nothing but the so-called "Suppose" questions. For example: "If you were a superhuman, will you maintain world peace?" "There is a box in front of you, in which there is a very large amount of money, yet there are also some explosives in it, and there is 50 percent chance of explosion. Will you still open it, and why?"

4.5.4 Blog on Blog

Compared with other topics, I am more interested in blogs on blogging. What are the opinions of ordinary bloggers towards this new online communication tool? What are their reactions towards other bloggers? Seven bloggers talked about blogs in their posts: bloggers usually say sorry to readers for not updating their blogs frequently. The interesting question is: do anonymous readers really care about unknown bloggers? Do they say sorry to friends or to anyone visiting their blogs? Who cares about the bloggers' regret? After all, there are tens of thousands of blogs that have never been visited by readers other than the blogger himself.

One blogger summarizes in one post the main contents and writing styles of bloggers that he visits frequently. Another regards the year 2005 as the birth year of celebrities' blogs; he thinks voyeurism is the main reason for high hits to such blogs. One blogger commemorates the one year anniversary of his blog, and he is quite satisfied with the traffic: "Total page views: 16,336; Page views today: 124; Page views this week: 226", he categorizes his blog into four types, namely: posts on work, life, love and photos. The blogger warmly invites readers to comment on which of the four templates they like most: writings, photos, links or music. One blogger does not know which preference he should give to: more posts with lower quality or fewer posts with higher quality. Another blogger also talks about this issue, saying:

> Personally I think attracting 8,000 hits means nothing and the statistic function of blogs should be removed. A blog in essence is a personal space: it is first a place where you can reflect something, and secondly, it is a place where you exchange ideas with others or share information. I look down upon the stupid guys who turn their personal blogs into a website and try every means to attract hits. If your blogs attract more than 10,000 hits per day, then what is the difference between your blog and a public toilet? In other words, do not attempt to look for the so-called business opportunity from your blog. If your blog is full of pop-up advertisements, can you still call it a blog?

Even though the comment of this blogger is a little acrimonious and partial, it is reasonable: one should treat his blog as a quiet home, where he can have a good rest. Though one may welcome the visits of friends, a blog is not a public bar— the purpose of running a blog is not to earn money, but to express one's feelings, share one's story or thoughts with others. Should one want to earn money, he can try other ways rather than a personal blog.

4.5.5 The Blog as a Publishing Channel

Five bloggers share their literary writings with readers. Here "writing" refers to poems or essays written by bloggers, no matter how naive and fluffy they may appear from the perspective of literary magazine editors. Blogs thus provides a free and convenient way for literary amateurs to practice writing skills, and share them with readers.

4.5.6 The Blog as an Online Diary

Just as the American bloggers do, most Chinese bloggers treat their blogs as an online diary to which they can confide their happiness or sorrow, or to document their daily activities. SOHU (2005) finds that personal life is the most popular topic, and it accounts for 36.2% of all the topics provided by the interviewer.

4.5.6.1 Holiday Activities

Christmas and New Year holidays are the right time for people to go shopping, dine out, or have a party. Six bloggers record their wonderful activities during the holiday.

4.5.6.2 Films/Music/Books

Entertainment is a popular topic in blogs. Altogether 19 bloggers talk about their favourite movies, TV series, and singers. Two domestic blockbusters produced in 2005 in China, namely: *Promise* and *Perhaps Love* are talked about frequently by bloggers. The Chinese bloggers seem not to be interested in reading books very much, since only three persons talk about books they read recently.

4.5.6.3 Work / School life

There are 10 bloggers who talk about their busy work; some bloggers give detailed schedules of their work; some talk about their travel to other cities on business. Four bloggers talk about their school life, such as being busy preparing for term examination, doing homework etc. One blogger reveals his dissatisfaction with his professor, who criticized him for being absent from class; he even mentions the name of his professor, assuming that his professor may not read his blogs. After all, finding a specific post in the vast blogosphere is serendipity. But who knows? Both in China and America, with the rapid increase of blogger numbers, there appeared more and more lawsuits caused by abusing others or revealing others' privacy.

4.5.6.4 Feelings

Fifteen Chinese Bloggers take private blogging as a haven to which they can confide feelings. Receiving a birthday gift is worth recording in one's blog, so is the romantic time chatting and drinking coffee with a beautiful girl. However, most bloggers record their bad mood, such as loneliness, depression, anger, or disappointment. in their blogs. One blogger writes:

> I do not know what my value to society is. I am nothing but a puppet controlled by society. I have my own ideals, desires, and but they could not be fulfilled… perhaps blues music is most suitable for my mood now…my mind is in chaos now, I do not know what I am talking about. It is late at night, but I could not fall asleep, hence I open my blog…

Some bloggers would reveal their innermost feelings to others. For example, one blogger writes: "I am done. I like a girl, you know, the kind that I prefer. If I am a man, I would definitely tell her, but I am not a man. How cruel the reality is, I am just a girl, what should I do?" People usually would be reluctant to tell others such innermost feelings when talking face to face. However, in their blogs, they are courageous enough to talk about everything they want. The most important reason is that their identities remain unknown to others, unless they publicize real personal information in the profile. According to a research conducted in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, 67% of the white-collar bloggers do not mind revealing their privacy in their blogs.[21]

4.5.6.5 Health

Personal health is talked about a lot in blogs. Altogether 11 bloggers (19%) talk about their illness in blogs, such as catching cold. Usually such bloggers are in a bad mood when talking about their illness and they complain a lot. Revealing suffers to friends, even to unknown readers, could usually be helpful to lessen the patient's psychological burden. Verbal comfort from considerate readers will make the blogger feel that he is cared for by others.

4.5.6.6 Reflection on Life

Small things that have happened in daily life may stimulate one to think further, and one may even draw some philosophic conclusion from such meditation. Eight bloggers share their reflections on life, which are especially helpful to those who are in difficult situations. One blogger tells readers to be optimistic and enjoy everyday life by saying (The post was written in English, there are 5 bloggers in my data who sometimes write in English):

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[21] http://it.people.com.cn/GB/8219/61035/61036/4244174.html

> Walking in the winter morning, cold but sunny, I felt so great just walking, seeing few people on the road since it is work time. Mind seemed empty; senses were focused on the sunshine and walk, felt joy without special reasons. When some cold and different faces past, I suddenly felt that few people enjoy the real life. All things to do were forced or driven then few nice feelings were inside…but joy is really important in daily life! Try to get it from inside not outside…

One blogger says that he would never give up when facing difficulties, because his mother said that failure, if treated properly, could be a good teacher. One blogger summarizes a fairy tale heard in childhood: in order to survive a severe cold winter, two hedgehogs have to suffer the pain of pulling out half of their spines, so that they can lean close to each other and warm each other. The bloggers then concludes: "When living together with family members or others, you should be tolerant instead of being fastidious, especially if you are the single child in the family." Another blogger says that sometimes one needs to relax, save up energy, and then prepare for the new challenge faced in life or work. One blogger thinks he would complain neither family nor friends nor society for his failure, and he should stand on his own feet. Such meditation is illuminating and can be applied to readers. Since such philosophic thoughts are usually drawn from personal experiences, we are more likely to accept them.

4.5.6.7 Confession

People often feel guilty for their wrongdoings. One needs a place to reveal his secret so that the psychological burden could be released. Six persons confess in their blogs. One blogger says that he is too careless and short-tempered. Another blogger feels guilty because he lives a "corrupt" life after graduation: instead of looking for a job, he has indulged in playing computer games, watching films, and surfing the Internet. One student feels ashamed because he did not study hard enough and always plays truant. Another blogger blames himself for he is amused by a vandalism: when seeing the Chinese characters "I am wrong" were written on a newly paved cement road in front of a library, he had wanted to take pictures just for fun. He writes: "I need self-questioning, because it seems that my curiosity almost beats my social morality of criticizing the vandalism."

4.5.6.8 Charity

There is a warm-hearted student who donated money to poor children. In his blog, he writes down the detailed process of selling goods for charitable purposes, he also publicizes the buyers who support the charity behaviour, and expresses thanks to them in his blog. The Chinese blogger and his friends also donated money to UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund).

4.6 Interpretation

The content analysis result of the 60 American and 60 Chinese bloggers is quite surprising. Before doing the research, my assumption had been that since America and

China differ greatly in politics, social systems, ideologies, values, and cultures, the contents of blogs in each country should also vary, though some minor similarities may exist. But the research result is opposite to my hypothesis: the 60 American bloggers and 60 Chinese bloggers share more similarities than differences as far as content is concerned: family life, school life, work, entertainment, feelings, health, and confession are popular topics for both American and Chinese bloggers. In the following, I would tentatively provide some reasons to explain the phenomenon.

4.6.1 Essence of the Blog

A blog, to most ordinary bloggers, is nothing but an online diary. Despite its obviously public nature on the web, a blog is actually a very private online space. The blogger has absolute monopoly over the content. He has the final say on what to post, when to post, and how frequently he would post. The blogger can delete any post at any time he wants. If he is dissatisfied with the readers' comments, he can delete them easily, or simply choose not to provide the comment function. If the blogger does not want Internet users to read his blogs, he can limit the audience to his friends or even to himself only. In other words, a blog is like one's home where the host/hostess can do anything he/she wants. And even though a hospitable host/hostess may welcome the visit of friends or even strangers, he/she has the absolute right to drive one out if the comments annoy him/her.

Blogging is also not like delivering a public speech. Many bloggers mainly write for themselves, even though they may welcome others to read and comment. Readers should be aware that it is they themselves who decide to read of their own wills, and the blogger himself by no means forces them to do that, thus the blogger will not share any responsibility or liability. To sum up, a blog is a private online diary. The content of one's blog, to a certain extent, is the reflection of his personal thoughts.

4.6.2 Culture Differences

China boasts a distinctive Oriental culture and America represents Occidental culture. It is impossible to enumerate all the differences between the two cultures. But the following examples can at least give us some hints.

Chinese culture is a continent culture, and conservativeness is one of its salient features. Since ancient time, the Han people were plagued by foreign tribes, so the Great Wall was built to seclude the Han people from others. Farming is the dominant economy form of the Han nationality, which is characterized by self-sufficiency. In feudal China, social order and stability were mainly maintained by ethics, though laws also had some roles to play. Chinese culture also emphasizes harmonious relation between human and nature: human beings should obey the law of nature; otherwise they would be punished by nature. American culture, which originated from the European culture, is a marine culture. People in Europe voyaged across the vast and turbulent oceans to do business with other nations. So human beings must fight against nature and conquer nature. The most important rule of business is fair exchange, so the social order of western society is maintained by laws.

The central part of Chinese culture is Confucianism, which attaches great importance to family relations and clan relations. Confucianism believes that elder people should be responsible for bringing up the young, and the junior should show filial piety and respect the older. Hence it is natural to see Chinese parents take care of everything for their children: parents would pay for their education, buy a house for them when they get married, and take care of their grandchildren. Americans, on the other hand, value independence— people will feel shamed if they rely on their parents once they grow up. Christianity believes all the followers are the sons of God. In front of God, everyone is equal, so American parents treat their children as equal members of the family.

4.6.3 The Social Aspect of Blogging

However, we should not forget that both Americans and Chinese are human beings who share many commonalities. A human being is a social animal; and people must live in a society. A person should not isolate himself from society if he wants to cultivate a sound mind. One cannot live well without communicating with others; being a hermit in a strict sense is impractical.

People all over the world share some common understandings despite their cultural dissimilarities. For example, people everywhere agree that such characteristics as bravery, diligence, honesty, modesty, and warmheartedness are admirable, and hence should be cherished and encouraged; while such weaknesses as cheating, cowardice, meanness, selfishness, and arrogance would be condemned by all. In a word, people in different cultures generally share similar ideas on what is right and what is wrong, what should be encouraged, what should be avoided, and what should be despised.

Bloggers, being ordinary human beings, have the basic biological needs and social needs. Daily necessities such as clothing, food, shelter and transportation are indispensable for our survival. Hence it is not difficult to understand why both American bloggers and Chinese bloggers talk a lot about their dining out, and their shopping. Though details on daily life may seem insignificant and boring, bloggers like to write them down.

As I mentioned before, a person could not survive without living in a society. Society consists of small cells—the family; and every person has his own family. Family plays a vital role in one's life. Hence many bloggers talk about their family life such as having a get-together during the holidays; some bloggers also post pictures of their family members.

In addition to the role in family, every person has his own role in society; he can be a student, a worker, or a government staff person. One's school life or one's work is also of great significance to him. Hence quite a few bloggers give detailed descriptions of their daily activities at school or in the workplace.

Entertainment is an indispensable part of our colourful life. People aspire to enjoy daily life, hence many bloggers amuse themselves by listening to music, watching movies, playing computer games, reading books, and watching sports games. Everybody wants to have a strong body, whether by bodybuilding, jogging or other sports. Hence it is not uncommon for bloggers to share their favourite hobbies with others in their blogs. Feeling under the weather is not uncommon in one's life, so some bloggers talk about their diseases in blogs.

Human beings have rational and philosophical thoughts; they know how to use their mind to think and to control their actions. Also human beings are rich with such feelings as pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy. Living in a modern society characterized with severe competition, people inevitably have heavy mental burdens or even psychological problems for various reasons. When in low spirits, one should not just let it be because depression would not die out by itself. What one needs to do is to find an outlet to vent the depressed feelings in a constructive way. Blogging is a perfect venue for one to let off his anger or frustration: one can use dirty words, one can babble on and on. The blog, like a loyal and servile slave, will never say "no" to his master. Thus the blog plays the role of catharsis, through which the inhibited feelings could find a way out. Though the blog could not replace the psychologist, it after all provides a free, convenient alternative to release one's mental burden. That is the reason why a lot of bloggers talk about their feelings.

4.6.4 Confession from Religious and Ethics Perspectives

Interesting to say is that both American bloggers and Chinese bloggers confess in their private online spaces, though some confess from a religious point of view while others confess from an ethical perspective. Christian confession originates from the common belief that everyone is born with original sin. Christians should confess routinely so that they could ascend into heaven after death. Christians usually go to church to confess their sins. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) are great literary figures famous for their confessional works.

In addition to recording quotidian events, a diary gives one a channel to explore the inner psyche and to express deepest self. Hence many people confess sins in their dairies. Confession and self-reflection are commonly regarded as origins for secular practices of diary writing (Kitzmann 2003; Mcnell 2003). Swanson (2005) regards the confessional blog as a digital confessional diary; the only difference between confession in church and digital confession is that " the public eye, everyone and no one, replaces the priest as the mediator for the confession." Blogging provides a free, easy, and convenient way for Christians to confess.

In fact, before the appearance of blogs, Americans have used modern technology to conduct confession, which plays the role of psychological therapy. For example, in 1980, The Apology Project was put into service: an answering machine was used to record confessions from anonymous callers.[22] Allan Bridge, the initiator of the project, was famous for his remark: "The act of confession and apology is itself a creative act: an attempt to find meaning in the restructuring of one's experience into a moral tale. Only by finding a moral can one turn the page and move on."[23]

People who are not religious followers may also confess from a secular perspective. Human beings differ from wild animal in that they have consciences: they know what is right, what is wrong. If one does not reveal the wrongdoings he had committed, no matter to a priest, an ordinary friend, a diary, or a blog, he will probably be tortured psychologically forever. Once they confess, they are "reborn" and can now live a normal life.

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[22] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apology_Project

[23] http://www.mindpollen.com/book/mischief.htm

In China, confession from the ethics point of view dates back to ancient history. Self-examination is a common practice for a Confucian who honors honesty, being true to his word, loyalty and filial piety. The Three Self-Examinations put forward by Master Zeng is very influential in ancient times, and says: "Every day I examine myself on these three points: in acting on behalf of others, have I always been loyal to their interests? In intercourse with my friends, have I always been true to my word? Have I failed to repeat the precepts that have been handed down to me?"[24] During the New Culture Movement (1915-1927), influenced by Christianity, some Chinese writers began to confess in their literary works, among them, Yu Dafu (1896-1945) was the most famous one. Ba Jin (1904-2005), one of the greatest literary figures in China, wrote a series of discursive writings between 1978 and 1986, the writings are included in *Random Thoughts*. In these writings, he confessed the wrongdoings committed during the Cultural Revolution in a painfully honest manner. Ba Jin's works caused a big stir in China; and confessional works are not uncommon in Chinese literature now.

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[24] The Quotation is from *The Confucian Analects*.

4.6.5 Application of Hierarchy of Human Needs to Blogs

The Hierarchy of Human Needs put forward by American psychologist Abraham Maslow may help us understand the practice of ordinary bloggers better. The theory is often presented as a pyramid, and the five levels, arranged from the bottom to top, are physiological needs, safety needs, love/belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. The theory argues that once the first level needs are taken care of, an individual can then concentrate on the second layer, and then third, the fourth, and finally the fifth. Each layer takes precedence over the layer above it.

The physiological needs refer to the basic daily necessities that human beings have to resolve in order to survive. The safety needs refer to physical, financial, and familial safety. Humans want to be accepted by others and to belong to a certain group, club, and organization, which explains why bloggers often link to the blogs of their family members, classmates, colleagues, or friends. People sharing same interests or working in the same project or organization can create community blogs to which every member can contribute. Human esteem needs mean bloggers want to be listened to, be respected, and be valued by others. Bloggers receiving high hits and favourable comments would usually be regarded as experts in a certain field, and hence their opinions are authoritative and reliable. Admittedly readers' opinions may be quite different from that of the blogger, but commenting itself shows reader's respect to the blogger, though further discussion is desirable. Self-actualization refers to the instinctual need of human beings to make full use of their abilities to serve society. In blogging, self-actualization can be related to bloggers' willingness to share valuable information with others, and to offer help to others, by doing which, bloggers can contribute to the betterment of other bloggers, Internet users, or even the whole society at large.

4.6.6 Why Blogs on Politics, Religion or Sex are not Popular

Why are big and serious topics such as politics, religion and sex not popular among ordinary bloggers? My hypothesis is that the blog is a private space. It is not like a newspaper or a TV station whose role is to provide information to the general public. Typical bloggers mainly are more interested in their personal life than great national events.

In the Chinese sample, no blogger talks about social news or political news. It is not easy to explain the phenomenon. Maybe the Chinese bloggers are not interested in such topics: why should bloggers take the trouble to talk about things that have no close relation with them? Another possible reason is that Internet censorship is implemented in China. Sensitive terms such as Taiwanese and Tibetan independence, Falun Gong (literary translation: Practice of the Wheel of Law, a heretical religious belief in China), the Dalai Lama, and the Tiananmen Square incident could not appear in the title of posts. If such sensitive terms do appear in the posts, the Webmasters will probably delete them later (ONI 2005). That is probably the reason why Chinese bloggers are reluctant to talk about sensitive political topics in their blogs.

But on the other hand, bloggers as well as other Internet users do have the freedom to talk about social topics. The government also want to hear voices from the masses and Internet is a good channel. In early March 2006, during the plenary sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Internet users put forward as many as nearly half a million pieces of advice or suggestions to the government; the topics covered a wide range, such as anti-corruption, medical reform, countryside rejuvenation, and unemployment.

Even though American bloggers have the freedom to talk about politics in their blogs, such topics are not so popular. One reason is that bloggers, which mainly consist of young people, may not be interested in talking about politics in their blogs, even though they may air their opinions on politics through other channels. Lopez et al. (2005) find that the vote turnout among young people ages 18-24 was 47% in 2004, and the vote turnout among people ages 25-34 was 56% in 2004. The data mean that nearly half of the young people in America are not enthusiastic about politics. Young persons who are unwilling to exert their vote right may also be reluctant to talk about politics in their blogs. Another reason could be that December 2005 was not within the US presidential election period, hence there are not so many posts on politics.

As far as religion is concerned, China is a country with a great diversity of religious beliefs. The main religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. According to an incomplete statistic, there are over 100 million followers of various religious faiths,[25] which accounts for nearly 7.6% of the total population. However, religious followers are mainly found in the following groups: the old people, the women, the peasants, the illiterates, and people in the economically backward places. As we mentioned in the demographic study of Chinese bloggers, since they mainly consist of young people with better education and financial means living in big cities, it is easy to understand why no blogger talked about religion in the Chinese sample.

In America, the number of religious followers is also decreasing as time goes on. For example, according to ARIS (2001), ninety percent of the adult population identified with one or another religion group in the 1990 survey; howgver, in 2001, the proportion has dropped to eighty-one percent.[26] According to the 2004 Gallup poll, only about 44% of Americans attend religious services at least once a week. And regular religious attendance is more common in the Southern and Midwestern states than in the Northeast and on the West Coast.[27] In the American sample, bloggers were mainly located in the coastal States rather than the Southern and Midwestern States, so there are only a few posts on religion.

As far as sex is concerned, conservative Chinese are reluctant to talk about it in public. In feudal China, Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism are three major religions in China; and "abstention from sex" is the common factor of them. The situation was even severer when Neo-Confucianism, developed primarily in Song Dynasty (960-1279), became the accepted state philosophy in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). One idea advocated by Neo-Confucianism is sex continence: human beings should use mind to control sexual impulse; all sexual activities, with the exception of that for propagation purpose, are regarded as lascivious and hence should be denounced. In today's China, influenced by western culture, people are not as conservative as they used to be, but sex is still a sensitive topic. For example: sex education for juveniles is far from adequate. Sex knowledge is available in the Physiology Hygiene course for junior middle school students, but such knowledge is mainly instructed through self-study, teachers are reluctant to talk about it in class. Most Chinese parents, grown up in the 1950s or 1960s, experienced an age of sex suppression, and did not receive a formal and systematic sex education. As a result, they are unable to give effective direction to their children on the topic. Some people still hold the questionable opinion that teaching children sex knowledge may potentially allure them to pay more than enough attention to sex; and consequently, they could commit mistakes on that. In a word, sex is still not a public topic in China, and that is the reason why there are no such posts in the sample.

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[25] http://www.sara.gov.cn/GB/zgzj
[26] http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris/key_findings.htm
[27] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States

There are many American sex bloggers online (Rosen 2004; Gray 2005), but my research shows that sex blogging is not so popular as people might believe. Americans are more open than Chinese when talking about sex, but they may still feel a little uncomfortable if their sexual experiences are available online, because theoretically every Internet user can have access to it. Christianity has its own doctrine on sex. For example, for the purpose of chastity, sexual abstinence is prescribed for unmarried individuals. One of the Ten Commandments from the Bible is that "Thou shalt not commit adultery." American society has witnessed the consequences of "sex liberation" popular in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the rampancy of AIDS. In order to settle such social problems, American government and society are now persuading young people to be more cautious on sex. A Large amount of money was earmarked by the Bush administration to support the abstinence-only program. So generally speaking, many young people nowadays may possibly be more sensible and prudent than their counterparts in the 1960s or 1970s when dealing with sex. In a word, even in America, sex is not as casual a topic as one's favorite film or food.

We can look at the issue from another perspective. Granted that bloggers want to share their sex experiences with readers, they still have to abide by the regulations of blog hosting services. For example, the Terms of Service in Livejournal.com stipulate that users should not post contents that are "unlawful, harmful, threatening, abusive, harassing, tortious, defamatory, vulgar, obscene, libelous, invasive to another's privacy…hateful, or racially, ethnically or otherwise objectionable".[28] Bloggers who breached the Terms of Service should bear legal responsibility for their actions.

Chinese bloggers also have to follow the Terms of Service of blog hosting services. For example, users of Bokee.com, the largest Chinese blog hosting service, are not allowed to use their blogs to "spread any harassing, threatening, abusive, obscene and other illegal as well as ethically objectionable information"[29] (My own translation). Blogbus, another popular blog service provider, stipulates in its Terms of Service that all the related laws and regulations of the PRC should be obeyed by its users; specifically, it says that information spreading violence, obscenity, superstition etc. is not allowed.[30] Taking all these factors into consideration, it is not difficult to understand why posts on sex are not popular for the typical American and Chinese bloggers.

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[28] http://www.livejournal.com/legal/tos.bml

Arguing that topics on politics, religion and sex are not popular, however, does not necessarily mean that no bloggers talk about them. What I want to emphasize is that they are not prevalent topics among the typical blogggers, especially when compared with such other topics as daily life, work, and entertainment.

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[29] http://www.bokee.com/new/about/service.htm

[30] For further information, please visit http://www.blogbus.com/about/blogserviceterm.php

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the Thesis

Online Oxford English Dictionary defines blog as "a frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary." Being a nascent online personal publishing tool, the blog enjoys a strong and vigorous development impetus. Easiness and free of charge are two objective reasons for the rapid popularity of blogs. In the digital era, the blog is an empowerment tool that brings democracy to the grassroots. With blogs, every Internet user theoretically has equal opportunity to have his voice heard by others.

Americans first heard the sexual scandal of Bill Clinton from Matt Drudge's blog. In China, ordinary people came to know blogging through MZM. Coincidently, sex blogs on celebrities play the role of catalyst in stimulating blogs development in both America and China. In this thesis, the author conducts a case study on the "MZM Phenomenon". The author makes a comparison between MZM and American sex blogger Jessica Cutler.

Currently, academic research on blogs mainly concentrates on their application to journalism, political campaigns, education, and business. Personal blogs, which account for the lion's share of the immense blogosphere, however, are not given enough attention. So the author of this thesis focuses his attention on the study of ordinary bloggers.

The author randomly collected 60 American and 60 Chinese bloggers. Detailed private information of these bloggers such as gender, age, geographical location, and email address are noted down, as well as the numbers of posts, comments and links to other bloggers. The author then conducted some preliminary statistical study on the demographics of such bloggers, followed by detailed content analysis.

The study shows that bloggers in America and China share many similarities: bloggers are mainly young people; private information of some bloggers is available; there are more female blogges than male bloggers; and there are more bloggers in rich and educationally developed places than in the poor and educationally less developed places.

The study shows that for both American and Chinese bloggers, there is a moderate or weak positive relation between posts and comments; so is the relation between comments and blogrolls.

Many bloggers provide links to other websites, as well as favorite quotations in their posts. Generally speaking, bloggers welcome comments from readers and they are eager to communicate with their audience. Bloggers' understandings of the blog, which originate from their personal experiences, are helpful for us to know the essence of blogs. Some bloggers also share their literary writings with readers.

Before doing the research, the author presumed that due to vast differences in political systems, cultures, ideologies, social values etc., the contents of American bloggers and Chinese bloggers would vary obviously. However, content analysis shows that the majority of contents are the same for both American and Chinese bloggers: family life, school life, work, entertainment, personal health, feelings etc. are favorite topics for both of them. Big and serious topics such as politics, religion and sex are not popular for both American and Chinese bloggers. The author then tentatively explains the rather puzzling phenomenon. The author summarizes that the blog is mainly a private online space; and bloggers are more interested in documenting things closely related to their life.

5.2 Limitations and Further Research

Though 60 is a reasonably accepted number in quantitative study, compared with millions of bloggers online, the sample seems small. To have a better understanding of the whole picture, it would be useful to collect a much larger sample within reasonable limites. The larger the sample is, the more convincing the conclusions will be.

There are many important issues that remain to be addressed. For example: what kind of content is more attractive to readers? Do bloggers receive more comments from blogroll members or from unknown members? What measures should bloggers take to attract more hits? What is the average length of posts? Why are the Pearsonian r scores of American bloggers relating posts to comments higher than those of Chinese bloggers? What is the percentage of blogs that are not updated for a long time? In a word, there are many quantitative studies yet to be done.

Given enough time, the author would like to analyze the contents of top American bloggers such as Instapundit.com, Boing Boing, or Dialy Kos, and then compare them with top Chinese bloggers. The author has the assumption that top American bloggers deal mainly with big and serious topics like politics rather than personal life, while top Chinese bloggers discuss their private lives, but is this really the case? The author hopes to answer these questions in further research.

There are many other interesting topics that deserve my attention concerning the blog writing process. For example: what are the writing skills of popular bloggers? Is there any difference between our daily language and netspeak used by bloggers? Why are some bloggers not reluctant to share their personal information with readers? What are the differences between one's real identity and virtual identity? There are more and more lawsuits caused by blogging now, either because bloggers abused others, or because they revealed confidential information; so what measures should bloggers take to prevent the blog from becoming a verbal battlefield? Do bloggers have freedom to violate the privacy of others simply because the blog is a "private" place? Do bloggers have their own online ethics, and if so, what are they? What are the reasons for bloggers to give up blogging? What measures should blog hosting services take to attract more bloggers? Are there any differences between the contents of female bloggers and male bloggers? There are so many interesting questions waiting for enthusiastic scholars to answer.

Blogging is a relatively new online writing practice; hence my understanding of it is far from complete. The author will be very happy if this thesis could make some contribution to the scholarship on blogs, no matter how preliminary it might be.

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Appendix A: Demographic Data of the 60 American Bloggers

Number	Email	State	Age	Gender	Total Posts in Dec. 2005	Total Comments	Blogroll
1	N	Rhode Island			3	1	0
2	N		58	M	1	2	0
3	Y	Mississippi		M	8	47	18
4	N	Illinois	40		25	95	0
5	Y	Florida	26	M	7	0	3
6	Y	California		M	8	9	5
7	N	Illinois		F	3	2	0
8	N				10	67	1
9	N	Alaska		F	3	0	1
10	N	Ohio	18	F	1	2	0
11	Y	Washington			30	※	0
12	N	California		F	10	2	0
13	Y			F	7	94	26
14	Y	Maryland			20	102	21
15	Y	Washington	59	F	2	0	0
16	Y	Illinois		F	2	1	0
17	N	Maine		F	24	63	0
18	N	Kansas		F	38	296	63
19	N			F	19	13	0
20	N	Pennsylvania	28	F	7	2	0
21	Y	Maryland	45	M	17	1	7
22	N	Maryland		M	3	0	0
23	Y	Minnesota	15	F	11	32	4
24	N				5	5	0
25	Y	Pennsylvania	18		12	0	0
26	N	Minnesota	23	F	2	0	0
27	N	Virginia		F	9	9	18
28	N	California	30	M	1	1	20
29	Y	Illinois	20	F	3	17	0
30	N	California		M	5	0	0
31	N	California			17	38	0
32	Y	Washington		F	8	0	0

33	N	Minnesota		M	4	1	0
34	Y				18	0	0
35	N	Virginia		F	18	35	4
36	Y	Georgia		F	21	※	41
37	Y	Illinois	25	F	13	9	3
38	Y	Michigan	31	F	39	18	3
39	N	Arizona	22		7	5	3
40	N	Iowa		F	12	22	9
41	Y	California	33	F	1	0	0
42	N	Florida			2	0	6
43	Y	Minnesota		M	7	16	6
44	N	Idaho		M	9	33	11
45	Y	Massachusetts		F	46	130	21
46	Y			F	4	0	0
47	Y	Utah		M	46	87	64
48	N	California	31	M	8	10	0
49	N	New York	36	M	1	0	0
50	Y	Michigan		F	1	29	19
51	Y	Pennsylvania		M	8	15	23
52	N	California			6	1	2
53	Y	Colorado	26	M	58	45	24
54	Y	S. Carolina	21	F	3	16	3
55	Y	Wisconsin	14	F	5	2	2
56	N	California			12	4	3
57	Y	Kansas	27	F	33	67	0
58	N	Illinois			1	0	6
59	N	N. Carolina	34	M	9	0	0
60	N	Virginia		F	16	10	0

(Note: Blank means concerned information is not available. Bloggers marked with "※" means comment number is not available.)

Appendix B: Age Distribution of Bloggers in Two Blog Hosting Services

Age	Livejournal Users	Deadjournal Users
13	18993	58
14	89063	237
15	214266	1240
16	344780	5723
17	399285	20340
18	412659	38154
19	402181	42509
20	368071	36569
21	299520	26337
22	236780	18315
23	192033	12489
24	150484	8049
25	125939	5553
26	97195	3670
27	72555	2510
28	58424	1791
29	47858	1349
30	39622	1158
31	33861	847
32	26923	675
33	24060	582
34	20656	426
35	19890	376
36	17774	478
37	13659	273
38	10888	203
39	9925	239
40	8432	141
41	7599	96
42	6484	106
43	5738	77
44	5344	66
45	5931	77
46	5087	65

47	4096	62
48	3490	47
49	3262	51
50	3242	40
51	2898	49
52	2403	32
53	2220	27
54	1817	17
55	1914	23

Appendix C: Demographic Data of the 60 Chinese Bloggers

Number	Email	City (Province)	Age	Gender	Total Posts in Dec. 2005	Total Comments	Blogroll
1	N			F	2	2	0
2	N		24	F	1	1	0
3	N				17	23	7
4	N			M	3	9	0
5	N	Beijing		M	9	15	10
6	N			F	1	3	8
7	N				19	6	18
8	Y	Xi'an (Shaanxi)		F	3	2	18
9	N	Beijing		F	6	39	18
10	N				12	4	4
11	Y			F	20	73	29
12	N	Shanghai		M	5	14	11
13	N			F	7	10	12
14	Y		23	M	3	13	37
15	N	Hangzhou (Zhejiang)	22	F	8	56	16
16	N	Hangzhou (Zhejiang)		F	7	1	4
17	N				2	1	0
18	N		21	F	5	17	17
19	N	Beijing	21	M	1	2	0
20	N				3	1	0
21	N				8	3	12
22	Y	Urumchi (Xinjiang)	20	F	1	7	15
23	N			F	6	28	47
24	N	Dalian (Liaoning)		M	1	1	0
25	N		20	F	3	3	2
26	N			F	19	0	7
27	Y	Beijing	26	M	3	25	13
28	N	Shanghai		M	6	40	16

29	Y	Guangzhou (Guangdong)		F	6	5	14
30	N			F	6	32	19
31	N	Shanghai	26	F	12	50	61
32	Y		21	F	9	5	6
33	N	Hangzhou (Zhejiang)		F	3	0	14
34	N				19	109	23
35	N				8	23	10
36	N		19		7	32	25
37	Y	Qingdao (Shandong)		F	6	66	21
38	N	Beijing		F	4	2	0
39	Y				5	73	8
40	N			M	5	7	0
41	N		17	F	4	26	22
42	N				6	21	8
43	N				4	0	0
44	N	Shanghai		F	9	31	13
45	Y			M	3	1	0
46	N	Nanjing (Jiangsu)		M	17	50	4
47	Y				2	1	0
48	N			M	4	19	0
49	N		24	F	12	54	28
50	N				5	12	3
51	N	Shanghai	27	M	2	30	0
52	N			M	9	35	0
53	N		25	F	5	11	7
54	N				4	35	0
55	N				12	3	3
56	N				4	8	23
57	Y				6	2	3
58	N				1	1	5
59	N				3	2	6
60	Y				19	46	11